

# Sales of books and manuscripts

## H. R. Woudhuysen

Bloomsbury Book Auctions' next sale on July 3 contains some interesting early printed books, good modern first editions and at least one pleasing example of clever lotting: to get the first English edition of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, 1966, you also have to take home four volumes of Mao Tse-tung's *Selected Works*, Peking 1965 ("original wrappers, dust-jackets, soiled"). Two association items in the sale are of more merit. Robert Browning's copy of *The Letters of a Betrothed*, 1858, by Marguerite A. Power is expected to fetch £30-£50; a copy of the guide to the Paris International Exhibition of 1937 for which Eric Ravilious designed the wrapper contains the proof of another wrapper by Ravilious and a letter to A. J. Symonds ("They would have a Royal Arms; but perhaps it is better than the rather podgy Britannia I produced"). This attractive item is estimated at £60-£120.

At the end of May, Christie's held two sales on consecutive days, devoted to autograph letters, historical documents and manuscripts on May 29, and printed books on May 30. Both sales had good material in them which on the whole sold well. Quaritch bought many of the better items in the manuscript sale, including the draft of Marat's letter of resignation from the National Convention during the summer of 1793, for which they paid £4,000 (a private buyer paid £2,000 for the death-warrant of Mme Du Barry, Louis XV's mistress, against an estimate of £500-£800). Quaritch also acquired some unusual early eighteenth-century material relating to Horatio Walpole which, as well as letters, also contained his third-person account of his diplomatic career between 1715 and 1739, *Mr Walpole's Apology*, for which they paid £700. They bought four letters from George I to the French royal family and court announcing Walpole's appointment as envoy extraordinary, which were never sent. Two of

the letters are still unopened and went for £1,100 (estimate £300-£500).

A gardening diary kept by the Darwin family in Shrewsbury between 1838 and 1865 and containing a few references to Charles Darwin was withdrawn from the sale; a large collection of notebooks, watercolour drawings, photographs and letters by the French entomologist Jean Henri Fabre, estimated to fetch as much as £60,000, failed to sell. English literary items proved more attractive. A private buyer paid £1,300 for thirty-seven letters containing some good literary gossip from A. E. Coppard to C. Ewart Askew, mainly written between 1919 and 1929, with a small collection of Coppard first editions included in the lot. Twenty-five rather scathing pages by Diddin on Cambridge libraries (Trinity College library contained "nothing rare or curious") went for £1,600 to Hill (estimate £700-£1,000), but the autograph of Conan Doyle's uncollected story "A Regimental Scandal" just made its lower estimate of £4,000 to a private buyer.

Quaritch paid £1,600 for a copy of the memorial verses by Ben Jonson, Richard Corbet and John Selden for Vincent Corbet, who died in 1619. This document written on vellum has not been previously recorded and, while Jonson's poem was copied in manuscript miscellanies of the time, Selden's Latin verses are otherwise unknown. It seemed a modest price for such an unusual item compared to the £44,000 a private buyer paid for an autograph manuscript version of Edward Lear's *A Book of Nonsense*. This consisted of thirty-six pen-and-ink drawings, each with a limerick, and was probably prepared shortly after the publication of the third edition of the printed text of the work in 1861. Three other very fine Victorian items made remarkable prices in the sale: Quaritch paid £17,000 for the autograph manuscript of the memorial article Dickens wrote about Thackeray for the *Cornhill Magazine* (estimate £2,000-£3,000), £12,000 for a large part of the autograph manuscript of Mrs

Gaskell's novel *Sylvia's Lovers* (estimate £4,000-£6,000) and £7,000 for the autograph manuscript of the last chapter of Thackeray's last book, *Denis Duval*, with some notes and corrected proofs for the rest of the novel (estimate £3,000-£4,000). A collection of thirty-three letters and one postcard, all apparently unpublished, from Burne-Jones to Mrs Bankes Tomlin also did well, fetching £4,200 to a private buyer against a pre-sale estimate of £1,500-£2,000. A tantalizing letter from Ruskin in Oxford to his fellow academic and admirer of children, Lewis Carroll, made £220; Ruskin returned a book Carroll had lent him which "terrified me out of my wits, and I was quite doubtful about coming into my room in the dark the other night" - unfortunately there is no clue as to what the book was. Another great Oxford Victorian, John Henry Newman, was represented by a rare and apparently unpublished collection of about forty autograph letters to Charles and John Marriott. These were bought privately for £3,200 (estimate £1,200-£1,500); it is to be hoped that the editors of the huge edition of Newman's correspondence will be able to make use of these new letters.

Among the printed books sold by Christie's on the next day, May 30, a few items did very well. The most interesting was probably an extremely rare inscribed presentation copy of the earliest issue of Byron's poem *The Giaour* [1813]. Byron had fifteen copies printed as a trial edition of which only a proof copy in the John Murray archives was previously known to exist. Christie's copy was inscribed to Richard Payne Knight, with an explanatory note, by Samuel Rogers. Quaritch paid £10,000 for it (estimate £1,500-£2,000). Quaritch also paid £6,000 for a copy of the first edition of the first printed Russian code of law, issued at Moscow in 1649, £2,200 for a collection of H. G. Wells's works, mostly first editions, some inscribed by the author (estimate £1,000-£1,500), and bought most of the Boswell items in the sale:

these consisted of printed petitions to the Court of Sessions. Two Arts and Crafts items did reasonably well: an illuminated calligraphic manuscript on vellum, *I have It in My Heart to be Good*, produced by Jessie Baynes in 1905, was bought privately for £1,100, and the Ashendene Press *Utopia*, one of twenty copies printed on vellum, inscribed by C. H. St John Hornby to the calligrapher Graily Hewitt, was also bought privately for £3,600.

Bloomsbury Book Auctions' sale on June 5 had a few surprises, once more mainly from the Brooklyn Public Library in New York. In the morning Jarndyce paid £1,200, against a pre-sale estimate of only £75-£100, for eight eighteenth-century pamphlets, one of which contained the rare Oxford 1759 edition of Johnson's *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. Another collection of similar pamphlets, including *The Drapers' Miscellany*, Dublin (c1730), was bought by Quaritch for £1,700 (estimate £150-£250). Three curious association copies were also worth noting. Jarndyce paid £200 for R. H. Gooch's *An Old Man-of-War's Yarn*, dedicated to Dickens with his bookplate and posthumous library label, and several other books. A copy of Machiavelli's *Historie*, dated 1550 but possibly printed at Geneva c1620, and perhaps taken from a complete edition of the works, had the arms of the poet Sir John Davies with his motto "Nose Teipsum" in gilt on the sides; little or nothing seems to be known about Davies's library, and this example which may have come from it fetched only £70 to King. Finally, Mark Twain's copy of an 1869 reprint of the 1489 Statutes of Henry VII, with a note in Twain's hand ("I never speak except when spoken to"), made £120.

It was a disappointment that the "Webster" manuscript failed to find a buyer at Bloomsbury Book Auctions on June 20. The autograph scene from an otherwise unknown play (see Richard Proudfoot's article in the TLS, June 13) was unsold at £170,000.

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Cover picture

Patrick Hennessy's "Cliffs of Etretat" is one of over 100 pictures by Hennessy and Henry Robertson Craig to be offered for sale at Christie's, South Kensington, on July 10.

## A poet in the postmodern playground

Claude Rawson

JOHN ASHBERY  
*Selected Poems*  
348pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £16.95.  
085635 6662

John Ashbery is probably the most highly regarded living poet in America. He is, in more ways than one, the heir of Wallace Stevens, and like Stevens some three decades ago is acquiring a belated minority following in Britain (Carcanet have been publishing him for some years, and Penguin have also been in on the act, though partly through the Viking connection). The *Selected Poems*, first published by Viking in the US last year, is, like Stevens's corresponding volume, a highly personal stocktaking, which may disconcert the critics by its refreshing omission of some of the poems they most like to talk about ("They Dream only of America", for example, or "These Lacustrine Cities").

Ashbery is nevertheless in many ways a critic's poet, like many modern and postmodern masters, the product of a culture whose reading is shaped in the seminar-room and which accepts "explication" (even defeated explication, which is a permanent invitation to more explication) as an essential part of its reading experience. This need not imply inauthenticity. It is a natural (and by no means the ugliest) product of the hegemony of university English departments over the literary consciousness of the more affluent regions of the anglophone world, and, as Alvin Kernan showed some years ago, deeply rooted in the economics of (especially) American publishing, which have identified even for imaginative writers the profitability of the teacherly text.

The phenomenon of an academicized literary idiom is wider and older than the institutional hypertrophy of literary studies which it nowadays reflects, and doubtless more complex. Its roots lie partly in an earlier modernism, in the works of Joyce, Eliot and Pound, whose principal writings precede the proliferation of literature departments since the Second World War and may in some ways be thought of as late incarnations of the ancient idea of the learned poet. One variant of this is the poet whose learning shows not in his mastery of earlier poems but in his adoption of the style of professors, a narrowing of the old ideal to classroom dimensions which occurred quite early in this century and was not confined to university poets. It appears fully-formed, and in a manner Ashbery was to assimilate, in Stevens's "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (1942), whose very title mimics academic discourse, while a still earlier Stevens poem is actually called "Academic Discourse at Havana", though it first appeared in 1923 as "Discourse in a Cantina at Havana" and acquired its "academic" label in 1929.

That there is derision and indeed self-derision in such scholarly gesturing does not diminish its academic character. Stevens spoke jeeringly of poets of a certain kind as "intropective exiles, lecturing" (he may have meant Eliot, in 1918), but it's a truism that academic and mock-academic often come to the same thing. This is not only because deriding the academic is the academic community's favourite tribal custom. It is also that, in the high self-conscious mix of postmodern Shandyism, the ubiquitous element of parody, instead of implying rejection, tends to cherish what it mimics along with the mimicking self.

Ashbery's best-known poem, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror", takes its title from a famous painting by Parmigianino, but is as much of an "Academic Discourse" as any Stevens poem: its form is that of a lecture or treatise on that painter. Like Stevens's "Notes", it is an extended exploratory statement of the same centrality in Ashbery's oeuvre, and the same authority as a doctrinal key. It is difficult to be sure whether it's the intrinsic power of these poems, or our culture's sensitized receptivity to the academic, that has contributed most to this "classic" status. Certainly the volume containing and named after "Self-Portrait" is the one which first established Ashbery as a major figure, winning the three big book prizes (Pulitzer, National Book

Award, National Book Critics Circle Award) for 1976.

Perhaps predictably, Ashbery's poem goes even further than Stevens's in its half-joking apparatus of professorial pretension, citing authorities ancient (Vasari) and modern (Sydney J. Freedberg, author of *Parmigianino: His Works in Painting*, Harvard, 1950), and affecting a pedantic gusto for periodizing pronouncements or the explanatory aside or afterthought: "The words are only speculation / (From the Latin *speculum*, mirror)." The donnish parenthesis functions here as a didactic counterpart to the poetic *trouville*, a small leap of discovery that settles, somewhat limply, into punning congruence with the poem's principal image. It's interesting that Ashbery's didactic flourishes, like Stevens's before him, often strain to transpose themselves to a non-didactic wave-length of poetic epiphany. Few poets have been more self-consciously self-repeating than Stevens. And perhaps none has so confidently claimed, or with more didactic insistence, that repetition, and the endless restatement with variations, are of the essence of the imaginative quest, a hovering that precedes the homing in:

One of the vast repetitions final in  
Themselves and, therefore, good, the going round  
And round and round, the merely going round,  
Until merely going round is a final good,  
The way wine comes at a table in a wood

Such "mere repetitions" in Stevens's "Notes" are a key to the structure of entire poems, to their "circular" rather than linear progression to discovery. But they operate insistently in local ways, with words repeated and repeated and each repetition a nudge towards perceptual finality. The manner easily turns to mannerism, in Ashbery as well as in Stevens. In "Two Scenes", the opening poem of Ashbery's volume, the line "Destiny guides the water-pilot, and it is destiny" shows the pedagogue's emphatic manner put, rather clumsily, to tentative or exploratory purposes. The repeated word purports to be an advance on the first usage, a redefined confirmation of insight, enacting the process of discovery as well as its product. It's as though "What if was *Thought*" were shown labouring towards the "ne'er so well *Express*" in a blackboard demonstration, while purporting to be surprised by joy.

Ashbery has frequented the world of art scholarship and earned his living in the college classroom, unlike Stevens, who after studying at Harvard neither had nor sought close connections with the university world. And Stevens's exercises in didactic delivery sometimes resemble a philosophy seminar hampered up in a businessman's boardroom. It's amusing to see this feature rubbing off on Ashbery, whose experience of boardrooms must be considerably less even than Stevens's exposure to pedagogues. This comes over in poems like "Decoy", whose entire form suggests parody of public speaking ("We hold these truths to be self-evident: / That ostracism, both political and moral, has its place in the twentieth-century scheme of things"), or "Sonnets Mended", where there seems at times to be self-conscious mimicry of a public man's Commencement Address ("the learning process is extended in this way, so that from this standpoint / None of us ever graduates from college").

But it also occurs in Ashbery's many poems of more straightforwardly aesthetic exploration, with their repetitious precisions and their pleasure in the prim revolving of platitude:

The mark of things belongs to someone  
But if that somebody was wise  
Then the whole of things might be different  
From what it was thought to be in the beginning,  
before an angel bandaged the field glasses.

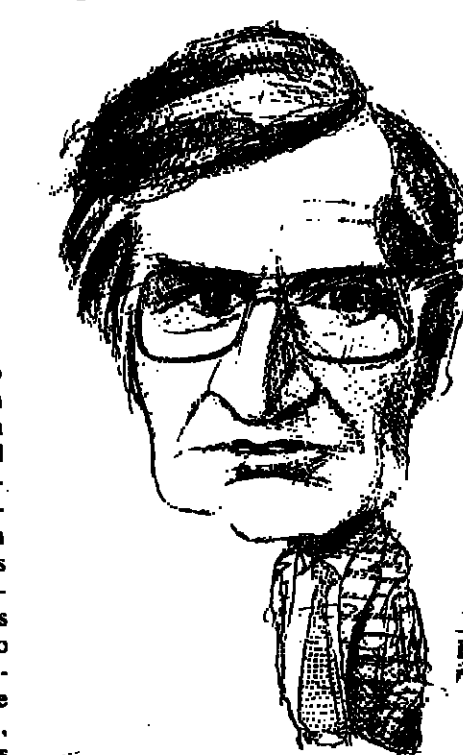
The idiom, the "doctrinal" content, the quaint angel image, are recognizably Stevensian, unlike the metrical spillage of the long last line, which is the kind of thing critics like to ascribe to the influence of Whitman. And it's true that America's most un-Whitmanian poets, Stevens and Ashbery no less than Pound, have often felt obliged more or less ostentatiously to make their "poet" with Whitman. But what makes their "poet" the surface garrulity, not the driving rhapsodic delight. Whitman's metrical capaciousness turns in Ashbery into a fus-

sy exercise in extended pointmaking ("Now all is different without having changed / As though one were to pass through the same street at different times"), just as Whitman's expansive enumerations turn elsewhere in Ashbery (in the list of rivers in "Into the Dusk-Charged Air", for example) into self-indulgent pieces of low-pressure variation.

Stevens is metrically more restrained, more "classical", but Ashbery's loping Whitmanian lines merely open out into a more relaxed version of Stevens's discursive prosiness. (There is nothing of the pedagogue or boardroom orator in Whitman's garrulities.) This effect is already visible, in a small incipient way, in "Two Scenes":

This is perhaps a day of general honesty  
Without example in the world's history  
Though the fumes are not of a singular authority  
And indeed are dry as poverty.

This goes back to the Stevens of *Credences of*



*Summer*. "This is the last day of a certain year / Beyond which there is nothing left of time", whose definitional laconism is pointedly slackened in Ashbery, in a tracing which out-Stevens Stevens's own lectures.

Ashbery's formative involvement with professional art-criticism has of course left other marks on his poetry than this predisposition to pedagogic utterance. The strong painterly interests which he shared with his close associate, the late Frank O'Hara, "poet among painters", derived much of their stimulus from the Abstract Expressionists. That influence might be expected to tend away from the academic, and is reflected most fully perhaps in an interest in randomness, in vitality of surface and in some strange energies of colouring. Both poets are variously "painterly" (though Ashbery, as Marjorie Perloff has pointed out, affects to play down the visual aspect of his art and claims to be "much more audio-directed", with John Cage as a seminal influence). But their pictorialism tends to be sharply though often unconventionally "representational", and strongly anchored in narrative. The "story" element in Ashbery comes over in fragmented and non-sequential ways, but the fragments have a strong power of visual evocation, and a startling precision of outline even in their most surreal effects:

Behind the steering wheel

The boy took out his own forehead.  
His girlfriend's head was a green bag  
Of narcissus stems.

This is painterly, but hardly Abstract Expressionist. Its visual counterpart is Magritte.

Ashbery has always been interested in Surrealism and Dada. He once began a doctoral dissertation on Raymond Roussel, and his works reflect a fascination with Roussel, Reverdy and other writers in the Surrealist tradition. He seems to know French better than most American poets, especially than Stevens, and seems correspondingly less addicted to peppering his own poems with snippets from that language. Stevens was in his way a painterly poet too, though Surrealism may not be what first comes to mind when we think of Stevens's

pictorialism. Yet even here the connections are close, and early. Ashbery's "Illustration" is written in an idiom of aesthetic *bizarrie* which recalls one of Stevens's most delightful early styles:

A novice was sitting on a cornice  
High over the city. Angels

Combined their prayers with those  
Of the lady, begging her to come off it.

One lady promised to be her friend.  
"I do not want a friend," she said.

A mother offered her some nylons  
Stripped from her very legs. Others brought

Little offerings of fruit and candy.  
The blind man all his flowers.

Readers of Stevens's "The Plot against the Giant" and "Cy Est Pourtraict, Madame Ste Ursule, et les Onze Mille Vierges", will recognize the ingredients: a more or less scabrous episode sharply and elegantly sketched, the dandy-decorative "slight lyric grace" hardened by a grasp of ugly realities, the festive offerings of flowers coyly fraught with bawdy meanings, devotional properties lightly but uncompromisingly defiled.

One might, on the basis of this evidence, propose an analogous progress in both poets from early "dandy" lyric to the more extended and abstract meditations on imagination and reality in the later work. In fact this "later" manner is to some extent already present in the early Ashbery. A second part of "Illustration" moves on to reflections on what the narrative may be thought to illustrate, and reads like a pastiche of middle or late Stevens:

Much that is beautiful must be discarded  
So that we may resemble a taller

Impression of ourselves. Moths climb in the flame,  
Alas, that wish only to be the flame:

They do not lessen our stature.  
We twinkle under the weight

Of indiscretions.

It's perhaps the first of several minimalist variations on Stevens's theme of the "major man", and occurs earlier in Ashbery's than in Stevens's work. Ashbery's progress in one sense replicates Stevens's progress from early to late, but his own early phase also picks up where Stevens left off. It is striking to see, not only in "Illustration" but in "Two Scenes", many features of the older poet's middle and later style.

Where Ashbery from the start differs from Stevens is in a recurrent atmosphere of menace, a violence of feeling or of natural process. This may be sensed in the surreal lyrics of "Glazunoviana", which ends, like "Sunday Morning, in the massive melancholy of a movement of birds, but a melancholy of explosive rather than elegiac suggestion:

In the flickering evening the martins grow denser.  
Rivers of wings surround us, and vast tribulation.

It is also conveyed in fragmentary hints of narrative ("Popular Songs", "A Boy") and in a more fully-formed state in the story of the novice in Part I of "Illustration", which ends in a lurid finale of sexual exposure and suicide:

With that, the wind  
Unpinned her bulky robes, and naked

As a roc's egg, she drifted softly downward  
Out of the angels' tenderness and the minds of men.

It's not often that Ashbery gives us a completed narrative. In "The Instruction Manual" the speaker, seeking escape from humdrum labour, imagines a rose-coloured novelette set in Guadalajara, a variation on Stevens's Latino-exotic dreamlands. But "A Long Novel", also from *Some Trees*, is neither long nor a novel. Nor, however, is it a Borgesian compression of a large narrative into a few paragraphs, as you might expect instead, but an elusive anecdotal surface concerned with speculative aesthetics rather than any story of human lives.

The professed anecdote is a favourite play in Stevensian poetics. Stevens himself has six poems entitled "Anecdote", one of which, "Earthy Anecdote", opens the *Collected Poems*. They tend to be fully-formed little fables, not fragmentary like Ashbery's, but in the best-known, "Anecdote of the Jar", both suggestions of "Anecdote" (story, informal chat) are subverted: the narrative is nugatory, and the poem's spare and resonant proposition







# Preaching as protest

Richard Gray

KAREN E. FIELDS  
*Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*  
323pp. Princeton University Press. £27.50.  
069109408

When rationalists in the First World think we have neatly separated sacred images from secular life, the Second and Third Worlds, Poland, Iran and the Philippines, disabuse us. For the insistence that religion and politics can be kept apart is one of the conceptual barriers which divide many in the West from most of humanity. This particular case study of a series of movements which swept across Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia (present-day Malawi and Zambia respectively) in the first half of this century freshly illuminates the relationships between politics and religion. Karen Fields's highly original analysis may thus help us to reconsider the nature of this barrier.

In *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa* Fields argues that previous studies of Third World millenarianism were written from two diametrically opposed analytical positions. Some academics saw these movements as political, but archaic, rebellions: the rebels were doomed to irrelevance because they remained ignorant of the basic economic and political realities which confronted them. They may have pioneered new ways of mobilizing popular protest to challenge oppression, but the future firmly belonged to secular trade unions and political parties. Other academics concentrated on the symbols and rituals of these movements, seeing them merely as evidence of cultural disruption and confusion. Images from biblical apocalyptic, mediated at first by mainline Christian missionaries and then, more arrestingly, by the messages of the Jehovah's Witnesses from Pennsylvania, were fused with African beliefs and rituals. The resulting outbursts of fervour were interpreted merely as symptoms of stress, hysteria and anomie. These cults, it is suggested, offered "a fantasy compensation". They were not political rebellions; they were a substitute for politics.

Karen Fields points a way out of this impasse by focusing attention on the nature of colonial society. If the rebels were in some respects archaic, so also, she argues, was the colonial order. Because the colonial state sought to rule with minimum financial resources, colonial Africa had far more in common with the Middle Ages than with twentieth-century Europe or North America: the colonial state, like the medieval one, tried to exploit the organizational and ideological resources of religion. Colonial administrators relied heavily on the co-operation of customary rulers, whose colonial authority had often depended largely part on their religious functions. Most district commissioners also sought to use Christian missionaries as sources of intelligence and social control. Peasants, migrant workers and educated Africans were, therefore, hardly guilty of irrational fantasy when they proclaimed that the forces arrayed against them were, at least in part, religious in character.

The sufferings inflicted on Africans were also perceived in a religious idiom. The process of "pacification", the trauma of the First World War, the pressures of taxation and labour recruitment, and the disciplinary demands of missionaries which threatened the basic identity of many Africans were most easily understood by equating them with witchcraft: with the symbols of evil which were most familiar to them. Baptism into the Watchtower sect often involved a denial of witchcraft, so it challenged the customary powers of the chiefs to combat evil, and therefore threatened the fundamental relationship of the colonial order. Around this potent traditional symbol of evil, Watchtower mobilized a mass protest against a whole range of grievances. The main political thrust of the new movements was located precisely in their basic symbolic motivation.

Pow whites came anywhere near perceiving this, one of the most sophisticated was Justice P. J. Macdonnell, who was sent to adjudicate in the trials of the Watchtower leaders. "Born into a secular society where, in his words, 'a uniform course of jurisprudence for at least one hundred years' had assumed that religion was so long as it remained quiet, was to be

tolerated and even protected, Macdonnell assumed that religion was purely a private matter. But in Africa, this was far from being the case. Baptism into Watchtower was an effective political weapon because it exposed the fragility of colonial rule. Officials in the front line shuddered as they glimpsed the potential of People's Power. Watchtower leaders may have erred in predicting that the colonial order was soon to be transformed into the millennium; but, Fields argues, "when people finally ask themselves How long? and answer back, Not long! they are already in motion".

Her study is solidly rooted in an intelligent scrutiny of the records of the colonial administration, and it makes notable advances on the theoretical analysis of these movements. Yet it is regrettable that in reconstructing "the horizon within which historical subjects thought

## Taking up arms

Michael Crowder

TERENCE RANGER  
*Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe*  
377pp. James Currey, 54b Thornhill Square, London N1 1BE. £25 (paperback, £9.95).  
085255 000 6

Much of the work written by historians of Africa over the past quarter of a century has been concerned with the history of the rulers - African and European - rather than the ruled. In recent years, however, some of the finest work on Africa has applied to the history of its underclasses, particularly in Central and Southern Africa, of which Colin Bundy's *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*

## Farmers' science

Michael Lipton

PAUL RICHARDS  
*Indigenous Agricultural Revolution*  
192pp. Hutchinson University Library. £12.95 (paperback, £7.50).  
009161320 5

In June 1985, an unpublished World Bank report examined thirteen agricultural projects financed by the Bank in Africa. During the late 1970s, all seemed to be doing pretty well. Five years later, only one was still working properly. Many other aid donors, and African governments themselves, have had similar experiences. The failures have been technical, not just social.

So does the answer lie in more research? Excellent economic returns have come from formal agricultural research in Asia and Latin America, but not in Africa. Why?

On the basis of fieldwork in West Africa, Paul Richards argues that "formal" agricultural researchers have made three mistakes. In seeking universal truths, they overlook the local adaptations of African farming systems to varied and changing environments. In accepting "cultural evolutionism", they wrongly dismiss African practices of managing the environment - such as the mixing of many crops in one field, and shifting cultivation - as primitive relics, to be replaced by more "advanced" methods transplanted from Europe or India. Third, in promulgating "top-down" science, they fail to learn from farmers' own experimentation. Even illiterate farmers can be scientific, and the work of West African farmers, such as the Ikale with yams and the Mende with rice, is shown to be at once adaptive and innovative.

This call for a populist approach to research and development, in which scientists would learn from the farmers, is not a rejection of modern science. But there is much to be learnt from African farmers about managing difficult environments. Scientists have been prone to condemn the burning of trees, but it turns out to be an efficient way of controlling weeds in acid soils. Changes in leaf pattern, and in birdsong, can be valuable predictors of rainfall. Richards brilliantly exemplifies how these

and acted", she has not made use of some of the most relevant sources: those of the missionaries. As a result, we learn little about the positive contributions that the missions made to these movements. We are given vivid portraits of authoritarian missionaries confronting and attacking Watchtower prophets, but there is little on the ideas and concepts which these same prophets brought with them from mission schools. The whole tradition of articulate political education associated with the Scottish missionaries at Livingstonia and Mwenzo is absent from the book; and since Fields provides no bibliography (an extraordinary omission in such a work), one cannot be sure that she is aware of it. Elmslie's reaction to the administration's attempts to legislate for stricter controls over preaching stood solidly within this school, and far from being formed in 1925

(reviewed in the *TLS*, January 4, 1980) and Charles van Onselen's two-volume *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914* (reviewed in the *TLS*, February 25, 1983) are notable examples. In *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe*, developed from the inaugural series of Smuts Commonwealth Lectures given at Cambridge University in 1983, Terence Ranger makes his own contribution to people's history in Central Africa. Drawing on an impressive amount of published and unpublished secondary material as well as his own extensive field and archival research in the Makoni District, which lies on the Mozambique border, he provides a fascinating analysis of the changing position of the Zimbabwean peasantry from the time of the imposition of colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century, and the conse-

quent alienation of much of their land, up to the conclusion of the bloody and successful struggle for independence during the 1970s, in which the ordinary farmer played such a central role.

Through comparisons with the Mau Mau in Kenya and the struggle of the peasant-based Frelimo in Mozambique, Ranger seeks to enhance understanding of the particular conjuncture of forces that precipitated the farmer into laying down the hoe and taking up the gun against the white overlords. He analyses with considerable subtlety the differing impact of colonial rule on the peasantry, and how even those who prospered were eventually driven to support the revolution. He is particularly instructive about their varying motives and their affiliation with different religious organizations - immigrant and indigenous.

There seem, however, to be three problems in his presentation of the arguments. The first is a literary one. In expanding his original lectures into a book, Ranger seems often to forget whether he is addressing his audience from a lectern or his desk. Further, his device of quoting extensively from the work of others rather than condensing their arguments in his own words interrupts his flow, and as a result his overall argument lacks the elegance and cogency of his classic *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa* (1975).

The second problem centres on his notion of peasant consciousness, which he seems to believe does not necessarily exist of itself but has to be developed. Thus Ranger's first four chapters are devoted to establishing that the peasants were indeed aware why their land had been taken away from them - for white commercial farming and ranching - and that "they knew that the Rhodesian state had discriminated in favour of white agriculture and had intervened in their own production in intolerable ways". As a result, they fought against the white regime at the local level to regain their lost lands, and nationally to achieve a transformed state which would back black farming against white and would no longer interfere in their production. But studies of West African peasants (or farmers, as they prefer to be called) - notably by Polly Hill in the former Gold Coast in 1956 - have long since made it clear that peasants are always sensitive to the nature and implications of adverse measures taken against them and quick to seize opportunities open to them.

A third problem lies in the injection of comparisons with Mau Mau and Frelimo into Ranger's account, even though he makes virtually no reference to the experiences of peasants in Zambia and Malawi, with whose destiny that of the Zimbabwean peasantry was inextricably intertwined during the colonial period. Some of his comparative questions are intrusive and detract from, rather than illuminate, his main thesis: for instance, to ask why there was no Mau Mau in Southern Rhodesia is odd since Mau Mau was *sui generis* and specific to the Kikuyu situation. What is really interesting is why, given the intolerable burdens imposed on the peasantry by their white rulers, it was so long before they took up arms against their overlords, and why they did so when they did. This is a question which Ranger does answer convincingly, particularly with regard to Makoni District, through a skilful combination of archival materials and personal interviews

and other parts of "farmers' science" increase the safety and sustainability of local livelihoods. Of course, it does not follow that outside scientific research can merely go along with existing practices. Sometimes, radical breakthroughs are essential. And indeed, Richards argues that African farmers can themselves be experimental, introducing major new crops such as cocoa, and appropriate irrigation systems too. He adds that secretive farmers, fearful of taxation, tend to hide such innovations from government and other "official" researchers.

The case for top-down science may be better than Richards suggests, however. There are dramatic successes, even in Africa, such as hybrid maize in Zimbabwe, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia. It can make sense to seek varieties of crops that grow robustly under many different circumstances, rather than responding to farmers' unquestioned skills in selecting many different varieties suitable to their own special needs. Very complicated and varied systems of mixed cropping, such as the West African systems that Richards analyses well, may be so complex that they are unsearchable; real breakthroughs may require single-crop, top-down research.

Are such breakthroughs necessary? Richards convincingly shows that West African farming systems react positively to new challenges. But challenges can be too big. In Africa, populations are doubling every twenty-five years or so. Such rapid growth greatly increases the pressures on families to adapt at the expense of the patrimony of neighbours and grandchildren: by grazing the common lands too heavily, "mining" the soils of their usefulness for future generations, and so forth. African population growth may require major advances in research, leading to much more intensive farming - not through mechanization, which Richards rightly dismisses, but through irrigation, fertilizers and new varieties of plant. But researchers need to tackle this challenge in a spirit of humility. They need to offer African farmers, not imposed packages, but ranges of options - partly learnt from the experiments of African farmers themselves.

*Indigenous Agricultural Revolution* illustrates convincingly the possibilities of this more humble approach to scientific research in agriculture.

# Uncovering the undercover

Zara Steiner

CHRISTOPHER ANDREW  
*Secret Service: The making of the British intelligence community*  
616pp. Heinemann. £12.95.  
043402110 5

WESLEY WARK  
*The Ultimate Enemy: British intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939*  
304pp. Tauris. £19.50  
085043014 4

STANFIELD TURNER  
*Secrecy and Democracy: The CIA in transition*  
304pp. Sidgwick and Jackson. £12.95.  
028399330 8

Christopher Andrew has been one of the pioneers in the attempt to make the study of intelligence historically respectable. In a series of articles and books, he has tried to bridge the gap between those with first-hand knowledge and those who must write about the subject from oral and archival evidence. This new book, which traces the precursors, foundation and development of the secret services, our present M15 (counter-espionage) and M16 or SIS (espionage), clearly shows how much can be retrieved from the official archives despite the closure of all secret service records and the extensive "weeding" of papers in files open under the thirty-year rule. Though the major focus is on the secret services and strategic intelligence, Dr Andrew has amassed a great deal of information about the publicly acknowledged service intelligence departments whose histories are so intertwined with that of their secret counterparts as to make practical or useful separation impossible. The result is an extraordinary and authoritative portrait of men and institutions and a book that few historians would have attempted or had the patience and perseverance to finish.

There are difficulties which Andrew fully acknowledges. The absence of the archive even for the pre-1914 period means that any history of the intelligence community must be uneven in its coverage and reliability and that the historian is more than usually dependent on luck as well as industry, and on the use of written and oral testimony which needs to be carefully sifted and cannot actually be checked. Despite a masterly recreation of all the events leading up to the publication of the Zinoviev letter, Andrew still cannot say whether it was a forgery or not: the final "corroborative evidence" cannot be found. Here, and elsewhere, particularly with regard to the Victorian and Edwardian periods, Andrew has spread his research net as wide as possible. The chapter on the Secret Service Bureau, the forerunner of both M15 and M16 established in 1909 in response to a German spy scare which was a figment of the Edwardian imagination, has 210 footnotes, culled from the Public Record Office, private collections, memoirs and secondary sources. Andrew has drawn on the work of a small group of intelligence historians who have specialized in a particular topic or period. For the Second World War, he has F. H. Hinsley's magisterial and indispensable *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (1979). The post-1945 period is only sketchily covered in a short epilogue and depends on such secondary sources as Anthony Verrier's *Through the Looking Glass* (1983), supplemented by a series of private interviews. None the less, even for the earlier periods which are the focus of Andrew's concern, there are lacunae and unsettled questions, some of which, like the problem of inter-service rivalries and the reputations of individual spy-masters and spies, remain open to debate.

What is astonishing is the amount of archival evidence Andrew has managed to uncover. It allows him to deal in detail with the period of the First World War, which saw the rebirth of British code-breaking in the Admiralty's Room 40, the extensive operations on the Western Front, and the development of counter-espionage and counter-subversion. Andrew is devastating in his criticism of the British intelligence response to the Bolshevik Revolution both in Russia and at home: a far less romantic portrait of "Sidney" Reilly emerges and Somerset Maugham proves to be a better novelist than secret agent.

In some ways, the chapters on the 1920s are the most historically impressive, in part because almost all we know of the organization of SIS and the all-important Government Code and Cypher School, centre of the Sigint (signal intelligence) war against Russia, is due to Andrew's own researches. The "innocence" of men like Lord Curzon and Austen Chamberlain not only resulted in public clings of the Soviet intercepts, which sealed off this stream of intelligence in 1927 until the Second World War, but encouraged a downgrading of intelligence which left Britain unprepared for the rise of Nazi Germany. All the intelligence services were starved of men and money; the Foreign Office was distinctly uncomfortable about its SIS stepchild while neither the bright nor the ambitious were attracted to the service departments. M15 fared no better. This is a melancholy tale of incompetence and rivalry, poor management and co-ordination, penetration and inexcusable breaches of security at home and abroad. In the autumn of 1939, the worst SIS disaster of all, the Venlo incident, destroyed its entire operation in the Netherlands. There then followed that amazing renaissance in which Churchill was to play so important a part. The staffing of Bletchley Park on the eve of the war was a hurried and informal affair involving the recruitment - mainly by two dons of King's College, Cambridge, who had served in Room 40 - of "professor types" such as linguists, historians, classicists and mathematicians. This amateur establishment was to provide the British success story of the war. Andrew supplies some of the personal background that Hinsley deliberately omitted.

*Secret Service* combines comedy, tragedy and farce in about equal proportions. Fortunately for the reader, it is not a pompous or pedantic account. Andrew fully exploits his varied cast of spy-masters, spies and code-breakers, some of them even more improbable characters than their more recent fictional recreations. Occasionally he succumbs to the temptation of the good story or of the presentation of one of his more bizarre figures in full dress. There is no shortage of material here, but then immersion in this subject encourages a jaundiced view of the "great game", however high the stakes or serious the consequences.

How important is secret intelligence in peacetime (Hinsley has settled this question for the Second World War)? Wesley Wark's first-rate monograph *The Ultimate Enemy* fully supports Andrew's contention that no student of inter-war foreign or defence policy can afford to ignore the intelligence dimension. Using the open files of the three services, the Industrial Intelligence Centre, and the Chiefs of Staff, Dr Wark has reconstructed the British intelligence picture of German aims and capabilities. Distinguishing between four phases of intelligence - secrecy (1933-5), honeymoon (1935-6), blindness (1936-8), and war scares and war (1938-9) - he shows how the misperceptions of the independent and poorly co-ordinated directorates contributed to the shaping of British appeasement policies up to the outbreak of war. Ignorance and optimism before 1936 confirmed existing doubts about the need for intensive rearmament and encouraged Anglo-German contacts without providing any motive for an examination of the long-term prospects for peace. In the years between 1936 and 1938, on the contrary, each of the service directorates (the Admiralty was the slowest to be converted) adopted a worst-case scenario and along with the IIC, a semi-clandestine industrial intelligence organization only created in 1931, stressed the immediate capacity of the Germans to wage war on land and in the air. This extremely pessimistic view of the near and medium-term military balance was crucial in convincing the cabinet that it must avoid a policy of deterrence before and during the Munich crisis. The bleak appraisal of Britain's chances was confirmed by the IIC's belief in Teutonic efficiency and the superior organizational capacities of a totalitarian state.

The final phase of intelligence reporting during 1938-9 moved dramatically in the opposite direction. After a series of war scares (themselves generated in part by German intelligence), all the directorates swung to a radically different and optimistic reading of Britain's chances of surviving a knock-out blow and defeating Germany in a war of attrition. This new appraisal, which provided the backdrop to the Polish guarantee, was not the result of any real

improvement in the numerical ratios of military forces. It can certainly be argued that the balance of power in the spring and summer of 1939 moved in the Germans' favour. It was a shift of perspective, the sense that appeasement had failed and that war was near, which led the intelligence analysts to consider comparative factors that had been ignored earlier and to abandon less hopeful measures of strength.

*The Ultimate Enemy* is unusually rich in its contents and will certainly become essential reading for those interested in Britain's appeasement policies. But Wark's reading of the major intelligence failures of this period has a wider applicability. There were problems connected with the nature of the Hitler regime that made accurate analysis difficult; the British, too, suffered first from a lack of information and then from too much conflicting intelligence. But there were also basic failures in analysis that have a contemporary relevance. The use of "mirror-images" to interpret enemy behaviour and the "worst-case" scenario proved to be dangerous analytic tools; the tendency to assume rational and consistent behaviour made it exceedingly difficult to predict Hitler's long-range intentions. The preference for quantitative over qualitative factors in measuring relative strengths led to an underestimation of the German potential in the early years and then to a gross exaggeration when the pace of Nazi rearmament was accelerated. But most damaging of all was the retention of certain unexplored hypotheses and beliefs which were not discarded until there was no other choice. If there are any lessons to be learnt from the past, the intelligence record has a special claim on the historian's attention.

Admiral Stanfield Turner was brought in by President Carter to be Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in 1977 to restore the reputation and morale of the CIA. He has now written an account of his experiences which is very

much an American hybrid between memoir and defence, but also a discussion of the problems of organizing secret intelligence in an open society where Congress and the media act as public watchdogs. The book itself highlights the differences between the American and British approaches to this question. One cannot imagine "C", the head of SIS, whose very identity was kept a dark secret until recently, writing an account of SIS which argues the case for public accountability and starts with a complaint against arbitrary CIA vetting procedures which resulted in over 100 deletions in the present text.

British readers should not be put off by the rather simplistic style of writing or what may appear to be a certain lack of sophistication on the part of a man who, after all, held one of the most difficult jobs in Washington. *Secrecy and Democracy* tells the story of the Admiral's efforts to revive the CIA by cutting the power and reducing the size of its over-mighty espionage branch, whose dubious tactics had brought it into disrepute. Turner discusses the problems of controlling the CIA's very different and autonomous espionage (the most prestigious), analysis and technical branches, as well as of managing the Washington intelligence community, of which the CIA is only one part and which retains a cockpit of competing agencies, each with its own systems of intelligence collection and analysis. Even readers without any strong interest in the American jungle will find Turner's descriptions of what intelligence agents and analysts do in a world where electronic surveillance has all but eclipsed human methods of collection particularly enlightening. So, too, is the discussion of the analytic function, which has a special relevance for countries like Britain that cannot compete in the technological race between the Superpowers. Signals intelligence has given way to spy satellites, but the problems of inter-

improvement in the numerical ratios of military forces. It can certainly be argued that the balance of power in the spring and summer of 1939 moved in the Germans' favour. It was a shift of perspective, the sense that appeasement had failed and that war was near, which led the intelligence analysts to consider comparative factors that had been ignored earlier and to abandon less hopeful measures of strength.

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## July Books

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pretation remain the same.

Throughout this account and in a special foreword to the British edition, Turner argues that a measure of outside control and oversight is essential both for the protection of the private citizen and for the proper functioning of intelligence agencies. His own view that the right balance was achieved between the Congressional committees and the CIA under the Carter administration has been much debated. Paradoxically, given the Admiral's contention that under Reagan the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of secrecy, it has been said that Carter was already proceeding in the same direction before he left office. In the United States, concern for citizens' rights and demands for Congressional oversight seem to wax and wane with the state of Soviet-American relations. But the Congressional intelligence committees remain in existence and some measure of oversight continues.

The situation in Britain is totally different. Whether out of ignorance or because of a greater confidence in their government, the British public accept almost without protest far more intrusions on their privacy than are really necessary for the security of the state. They are given less public information about intelligence than their American counterparts. There is no real system of outside oversight.

This need not involve a parliamentary committee of the Congressional type, given the differences in the structure of the two governments, but there could be a body along the lines of the Franks Committee of 1982. The doctrine of total secrecy, as Andrew reminds us, has been repeatedly breached. The scandals of recent years, the activities of the mole-hunters, and press and television revelations have already forced the government to defend itself in parliament and to drop some of the more ridiculous disguises devised to cloak Britain's intelligence activities. No one pretends that all is well with MI5 and MI6. Turner comments on the reluctance of British officials to confront and dismiss employees who are visibly a risk (Geoffrey Prime was an obvious case) or who are not performing well or are no longer needed. Accountability to an outside body would at least break that protective circle within which, despite recent changes, the intelligence community continues to operate. Christopher Andrew is, I think, too optimistic when he concludes that the government will have to confront the problem of reconciling parliamentary accountability with the secrecy of intelligence operations. Barring another major spy scandal, nothing need change, despite the efforts of the few actively interested. Turner's foreword might at least increase that number.



C. Ebner, one of the many printers who worked underground during the German occupation of Paris 1940-44, producing clandestine newspapers, leaflets and pamphlets: an illustration from Imprimeries clandestines, which originally appeared in March 1945 as No 31 of the literary review Le Point and is now translated by Mark Thompson as Underground Presses and republished as No 13 of Pentagon Papers (46pp, Pentagon Design, 11 Needham Road, London W11 2RP, £5).

## Hoist with their own petard

Jeremy Waldron

RICHARD SHEARS and ISOBELLE GIDLEY

*The Rainbow Warrior Affair*

217pp. Unwin. Paperback £2.95.

0049000041

JOHN DYSON

*Sink the Rainbow: An enquiry into the*

*'Greenpeace Affair'*

192pp. Gollancz. £8.95.

05750385X

Shortly before midnight on July 10, 1985, the flagship of the Greenpeace organization – the 418-tonne vessel *Rainbow Warrior* – was rocked by an explosion and began to sink at her moorings in Auckland Harbour. The crew and their friends, some of whom had been asleep while others were winding down from a party on board, quickly abandoned ship. One man, Fernando Pereira, went below apparently to retrieve his cameras. Minutes later a second explosion occurred. By dawn it was clear that the ship was lost, her back broken and Pereira was drowned. There were no other casualties.

On September 22 the French Prime Minister, Laurent Fabius, finally acknowledged to the press: cofference in Paris that agents of the DGSE (the French equivalent of MI6), acting on orders, had sunk the *Rainbow Warrior*. The head of the DGSE was fired and the Minister of Defence resigned. On November 4, two French agents who had been held in New Zealand pleaded guilty in Auckland to charges of manslaughter and wilful damage. Each was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. It was acknowledged that they had acted in support of those who placed the explosives. The latter, however, had managed to return to France and have not been brought to justice.

The main features of the story linking these events are by now well known. But it is a story that should be told in detail, and one that can be pursued at many levels. At one level, it is a rollicking yarn of international espionage and state terrorism. It can be told in the style of Frederick Forsyth: the meticulous preparations of the French saboteurs in Paris, London, Noumea, and northern New Zealand; the high life they led in Auckland and Whangarei before the operation; the details of the yachts, dinghies, explosives, and underwater apparatus that they used; the sabotage itself – the rendezvous, signals, back-ups, and the narrow escape from New Zealand of the main team of saboteurs. Or it can be told in the style of John le Carré: the background of disillusionment and incompetence in the DGSE; the sordid tale of Christine Cabon, the French agent assigned to infiltrate Greenpeace, who was later protected from the New Zealand police by the French authorities, grateful for her past

exploits infiltrating Palestinian organizations; the obstinate but unlucky police work of Superintendent Allan Galbraith in Auckland, Noumea and Paris; the attempt by French sources to discredit MI6 in the operation; the ill-fated official investigation in Paris by Bernard Tricot who, less than a month before Fabius's confession, announced that there was no French responsibility in the affair; the rivalry between DGSE and the French Ministry of the Interior which allowed the press to expose the cover-up; and the arrogant refusal of the American authorities to condemn the sabotage or assist the New Zealand police.

At another level, it is a story of international politics. Here three themes are tangled together: the history of French colonialism in the Pacific; the use of that ocean by Britain, France and the United States for the testing of nuclear weapons; and the general issue of Pacific security, complicated by New Zealand's defiance of the American nuclear presence, the disillusionment of Pacific states with American economic exploitation as well as a growing Soviet presence in the region.

France has held Tahiti, first as a protectorate, then as a colony since 1842. Pressure for independence has been growing since the Second World War, though it has never had the ferocity of recent killings and rioting in New Caledonia, the other French colony in the Pacific. The campaign for independence has followed a familiar pattern. Leaders of the autonomist movement were alternately imprisoned and elected to representative office. Concessions were made on the issue of local self-government, and both Tahiti and New Caledonia have had autonomous governing councils since 1976. But there has been no indication that this is a step on the road to eventual decolonization. France retains control of the territories' communications, finances, foreign relations and, of course, defence. The reasons for French tenacity in the region have nothing to do with economic exploitation: economically the locals benefit enormously from the scale of the French military presence. In fact, beyond their beauty and position the Tahitian Islands have very little that is exploitable. But their position is a strategic asset to a would-be nuclear power.

The Pacific has been used as a nuclear testing ground by all the non-communist powers. It is estimated that some 250 devices have been exploded in the area since the destruction of Nagasaki. Britain and the United States tested weapons on islands under their control in the Pacific north of the equator, and indeed the *Rainbow Warrior* had been involved immediately before her last arrival at Auckland in the evacuation from Rongelap atoll of Marshall Islanders who were suffering from the effects of American tests some twenty years earlier. France's *force de dissuasion* was tested

originally above and below ground in remote desert regions of Algeria, but this led to strong African objections and was in any case politically difficult after 1962. Mururoa Atoll in the Tahiti group seemed an ideal replacement. It is nowhere near sea-lanes or air routes; it is 800 miles even from the centres of Tahitian population and further from any of the major cities of the Pacific than Nevada is from New York. Still, the testing of more than forty devices in the atmosphere above the atoll led to intense international protest, orchestrated in the 1970s by the defiant presence of Greenpeace vessels and, occasionally, New Zealand warships in the test zone. In 1974, the French moved their tests underground, diminishing the threat of airborne radiation to Pacific basin countries. But the protest has not diminished. It is partly a concern about nuclear testing as such, and its presence in what is often still viewed romantically as a paradisaical region. But safety is also still a worry: a series of accidents in 1979 and concern about damage to the geology of the atoll itself have kept alive fears that radiation from the underground tests will eventually leak into the ocean environment.

The French are at once brusquely dismissive of the protests and yet greatly solicitous of world opinion. Tahitians are told that, as long as defence remains a matter for the colonial power, nuclear testing in the region is none of their business. Greenpeace protests have led to the past to the seizure of boats, and the violent apprehension of their crews. At the same time, French politicians and generals bathe ostentatiously in the waters of the atoll after every test and show film of pyramids of wine-glasses undisturbed by the explosions. In 1983, the French invited a team of international scientists to inspect the site – the only nuclear power to do so. Nuclear weapons and colonial territories are sensitive possessions in the international forum: the French remain extraordinarily vulnerable to organizations like Greenpeace whose activities focus world attention on both of these issues in the waters around Mururoa.

The books under review appear less than six months after the denouement of the affair. In both of them, chapters on the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior* are interspersed with useful background discussions of the politics of the region. In the case of Richard Shears's and Isabelle Gidley's *The Rainbow Warrior Affair*, these chapters on Pacific politics save it from reading like a bad novel. The authors have chosen to present the story of the sabotage in a dramatized form, telling us what Admiral Lacoste thought as he reached for his telephone, and how Defence Minister Patrick Charles Heriau fingered his beard as his blue eyes went back over one particular passage in the report. But these irritations of style are less important than the fact that both books go far beyond the information that has been made

officially available without indicating how much is speculation and how much has come from sources whose confidentiality they need to protect. One suspects that the books are the products of excellent investigative reporting; but since they were so quickly produced, since some at least of their material is so clearly reconstructive, and since we still lack any official account of the exact level at which the sabotage operation was initiated, it would be helpful to be told where the story is based on information supplied and where it is not.

The most frustrating thing is that none of the authors appears to have any difficulty in accounting for the motivation of the plotters to sink the *Rainbow Warrior*. But that surely is the unanswered question. Quite apart from who initiated the sabotage, what did those responsible expect to gain or expect France to gain from the operation? What was their best-case scenario? That the ship would explode and sink in Waitemata Harbour? That Greenpeace would be ruined and its members terrorized into abandoning their campaign? That nobody would notice or that French involvement would not be suspected? The desire to cripple Greenpeace is intelligible enough, and even the desire to eliminate the vessel: dealing with a sturdy ocean-going trawler in the test zone is quite different from seizing and boarding a yacht, which is all that the French authorities had to do in the past. But it was not the physical existence of the vessel that threatened the testing programme, it was the irritating publicity associated with its presence in the test zone. If the end was to avoid embarrassment and bad publicity, why choose as a means a spectacular act of terrorism in the otherwise placid harbour of the nation most consistently opposed to one's policy? Considering the risks – and we know what they are because they happened (two French agents in a New Zealand prison, a cover-up exploded, international protest, and the forced resignation of the Minister of Defence) – why was such a crazy scheme ever contemplated or permitted?

No doubt the answer has something to do with the distance that an organization – particularly a military espionage organization – is capable of putting between itself and political reality. Espionage organizations necessarily insulate themselves from reality checks such as common sense, the reaction of friends in other walks of life, and public opinion, which ordinary political actors use to evaluate their proposals. Like the CIA's exploding cigars, these dark schemes proliferate in the heady atmosphere of an organization freed from the normal constraints we impose on those who play with weapons. The difference is that this clear exploded, with consequences that were impolitic for France, unpleasant for the agents in Mount Eden prison, and tragic for the Greenpeace photographer, Fernando Pereira.

## On the point of honour

Jonathan Powis

ELLERY SCHALK

*From Valor to Pedigree: Ideas of nobility in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*

242pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press.

£23.35.

0691054606

FRANÇOIS BILLACOIS

*Le Duel dans la société française des XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles: Essai de psychosociologie historique*

539pp. Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. 330fr.

2713208670

Lord Bacon said that nobility was ancient riches. But many of his contemporaries in Europe around 1600 were more likely to think in terms of blood and lineage; and both the present authors contribute to our understanding of an age obsessed with the assertion and defence of ancestral honour.

Ellery Schalk's case is that these preoccupations had become markedly more acute in the course of the sixteenth century. Around 1500, pundits in France had tended to associate true nobility with virtue: more specifically with virtuous actions, especially (though perhaps less exclusively than Schalk implies) on the field of battle. By the middle of the century, attitudes were changing. Across Europe, religious and social upheaval seems to have heightened awareness of hereditary rank. In France itself, disengagement from the Italian wars raised questions about the military function of the nobility; while in the mayhem of the years after 1560, it was dangerously easy to assess noble virtue in terms of commitment (or lack of it) to a particular party cause. As scholars such as Devyver and Jouanna have already shown, this environment encouraged a far more strident assertion of the claims of blood and lineage. Hence Schalk's title: nobility was to be founded on the manifest fact of pedigree, not the display of a "valour" all too likely to prove contentious and divisive. So by the end of the sixteenth century, noble culture embodied and proclaimed the distinctiveness of noble birth: in the new craze for duelling – the point of honour was by definition a matter for gentlemen only – or in the fashionable academies for young nobles now appearing in Paris and the provincial capitals.

On all these matters, Schalk has much to say that is of interest. But his case is pressed a good deal harder than this, and harder perhaps than even his own evidence will bear. By the seventeenth century, he argues, a decisive transition had occurred. Till then, nobility retained its "medieval" associations with individual effort; by 1600, a more modern view was emerging, with birth marking out noblemen from other groups within the upper classes as a whole. But could any group reach the upper ranks of seventeenth-century France and fail to acquire some association with nobility? To judge from Schalk's own concluding chapters, jurists and financiers continued to gravitate towards noble status. And the repackaging of noble culture in the years around 1600 flaunted birth while insinuating money: the absurd Monsieur Jourdain – made much of here – would hardly have been worth satirizing in a world of impermeable hereditary caste.

The beginnings of the story raise problems too. Schalk notes that in France around 1500, birth counted for a good deal: what to make, then, of a social theory which so insistently linked true nobility to the virtuous individual? The author's introduction notes a "big gap" between practice and precept, but he may have widened the gulf beyond need. If early sixteenth-century moralists insisted that the essence of nobility lay in doing noble things, they took it easily enough for granted that the bulk of their targets came from families of some hereditary standing. Ancestry was a given. But it was a starting-point for, even perhaps a stimulus to, true (that is virtuous) nobility: not to be gloried in for its own sake. This was common ground among writers on chivalric prowess, and Latizing commemorators of ancient virtue, and the more grimly Augustinian scourges of aristocratic pride. And it was in this area that attitudes seem to have shifted most significantly in the course of the sixteenth

century. Consciousness of family was hardly new, as Schalk at times appears to imply; but its place in contemporary moral arithmetic began to change. The caveats dropped away; the claims of ancestry became more openly and less conditionally asserted; and the satisfaction of honour – an honour exclusive to the well-born – acquired a momentum of its own.

But in this field as in others, the indiscriminate pursuit of gratification could prove damaging to the health. By the end of the sixteenth century, the duel had become the means *par excellence* of asserting (hereditary) noble honour: a "contagion" of violence – the analogy with epidemic seems to have appealed to contemporaries – in which gentlemen took one another on with firearms and daggers and the ubiquitous rapier. François Billacois estimates that, in the 1600s, duels in France were running at several hundred a year, and there were to be a number of short-term intensifications of the craze before a slow decline set in around the mid-century. His large and subtle book advances on a number of fronts: from the evolving mechanism of the duel itself, to the political conditions which favoured or repressed it (foreign war seems to have been the most effective antidote), to the attitude of participants and critics. Billacois's story takes in Montaigne and Pascal, as well as the punctilious noble antagonists of the *Pré-aux-clercs*.

Not all parts of the story carry equal conviction, even allowing for the author's occasionally slyline turn of phrase. Billacois insists that the duelling craze was a peculiarly French phenomenon; but as Donna Andrew has recently shown, eighteenth-century jurors could prove remarkably tolerant towards gentlemanly swordsmen. There may be more to say, too, about why the precise forms of the duel emerged when they did. Combat *à deux* was after all hardly unknown in the late Middle Ages: whether on the battlefield, or as an accepted means of resolving substantive disputes at law. There is evidence that the judicial duel survived in France into the early sixteenth century; but it may be – a possibility not pursued by Billacois – that the significance of the point of honour grew as armies and legal systems increasingly denied single-combat any practical function.

Does this mean that the duel was in essence an archaism, a survival from a violent and undisciplined past? At times Billacois argues in just these terms, casting duellists along with the heretics and other assorted deviants whom the authorities of the early-modern world took it upon themselves to repress and/or reform. Jurists were certainly ready to define the duel as the antithesis of public authority, and one imaginative confessor wrote that the secrecy of the point of honour marked its essential kinship with the witches' sabbath. But the main burden of Billacois's account is very different, and more plausible: that the values which the duel asserted were too central to the culture of the upper classes to be confronted head-on by church or state. Critics saw duels as a source of anarchy, but royal magistrates were less ready to enforce rigorous justice against specific combatants (especially their own kinsmen) than to draft statements of Draconian general intent. The link between the duel and wider conflict – the vendetta or blood-feud – also seems debatable; we may today be more struck by the character of the duel as artifice, rule-bound in its violence. In an age attentive to clientele and family, gentlemen fought for their honour as individuals, and in privacy; fatal or not, the outcome seems generally to have been taken as final.

The duel was after all one product of a particular kind of aristocratic education – of textbooks on honour, and booming noble academies – on which both Billacois and Schalk have much to say. It may be straining paradox to see duels as part of the civilizing process, but Pascal came close to putting it that way: he condemned duellists less for causing violent death than for surrounding it with studied courtesy. As the seventeenth century wore on, it would be changing standards of courtesy, not government repression, that weaned nobles away from the point of honour: notably through such smart anti-duelling associations as the Confraternity of the Passion. And the most potent of all arguments against the duel – that it was merely, and absurdly, an anachronism – had yet to be invented.

## For and by the people

George Rudé

GENEVIÈVE BOLLÈME

*Le Peuple par Écrit*

281pp. Paris: Seuil. 95fr.

202009035X

CHARLES TILLY

*The Contentious French*

456pp. Harvard University Press. £21.25.

0674166957

Geneviève Bollème's book is both attractive and bewildering. It is attractive by virtue of its presentation, its sonorous cadences and the ebb and flow of a language that is fashioned and controlled by a master of the craft. Yet it is bewildering – to this reviewer at least – because, while the writer appears to be genuinely concerned to portray "the people" in a sympathetic light, she is continually erecting barriers rather than opening doors to a fuller understanding. For "the people", as conceived by Mme Bollème, is an abstraction which defies precise definition, hovering elusively on the borders of social and historical reality. As the title suggests, her main focus is on "the people" either as portrayed in literature or, by a reversal of roles, by individuals who have abandoned their "popular" base to write their own books. In either event, the problem of the great dividing chasm between "us" and "them" remains – either in the shape of the "popular" author who, having taken to the pen, finds that he has become irrevocably wrenched from the spontaneity or naïveté of his natural roots; or in the continuing impossibility of finding a common language between "the people" and its would-be intermediary or interpreter, the philosopher or historian or other trained practitioner of the literary craft.

To illustrate the point Bollème cites three examples: Michelet, the great historian of "the people" in revolution; Luxun, a Chinese poet, who writes in the service of people and Party; and Simone Weil, the French philosopher who went to work in a factory to identify with the working people at closer range. In none of these cases, she insists, was the attempt to bridge the gap between intellectual and people a success: it failed because no common language could be established between them. Yet Bollème goes on to cite the French Revolution as providing an exception to her rule. At that moment, she argues (following Tocqueville), "the people" found a weapon ready to hand in the literary language of the Enlightenment and its interpreters, which, in the event, it was able to take over and turn to the common use.

This appears to be a beginning of wisdom; yet her analysis does not go far enough. She seems to miss the point that, in the course of communication, whether written or oral, there is a certain give-and-take between the provider and receiver whereby even "borrowed" language is not merely passively absorbed but becomes transformed and, if circumstances permit, turned to its own particular use by the often despised receiver. Not only that, but in the process the roles may become reversed and the teacher become the pupil and the pupil the teacher. No less a communicator than Marx went through this experience when he fed back to the British working class in theoretical form the practical lessons he had learned in the British Museum from reading the reports of the factory inspectors on the industrial actions taken by the early proletariat. It is from failing to learn such lessons that Bollème, for all her undoubted sympathy for the "popular" cause and the persuasive elegance with which she writes, strips "the people" of its flesh and blood and reduces it to a stereotype.

This is a charge, however, that can certainly not be levelled against Charles Tilly's *The Contentious French*, in which variety, change, human response and development are the constant order of the day. His theme is the story of "contention" (or collective popular protest) over the past 350 years of French history; and he illustrates his story by reference to five main, widely separated, regions: Burgundy in the east, Anjou in the west, Languedoc in the south, Flanders in the north and Paris and the Ile-de-France in the centre. "Contention" of this kind he believes to be a perfectly proper and normal form of conduct and agent of historical development which, in the case of France, has been periodically provoked by two

main factors: the growth of capitalism from the seventeenth century onwards and the rise of a strong, increasingly unified, national State. And so, to put it briefly, the main theme of his book may be summarized in his question: How did statemaking and capitalism alter the ways in which ordinary French people acted together – or, for that matter, failed to act together – in their shared interests? And, further, how far did these factors effect not only their common interests but their organization and opportunity to act – not to mention (though this is not so explicitly spelled out) "the ways in which they thought of themselves"?

Having stated his problem so clearly, Tilly follows his story through four centuries of "contention" that provide what are on the whole convincing answers. Above all, whether confronted with the tax struggles, food riots or charivaris of protesting wine-growers or landless labourers in Burgundy, by civil wars between contending political factions in Anjou, religious disputes in Languedoc, revolutions in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Paris, or the direct conflicts between capital and labour in all France's industrial regions of the past 150 years, we are constantly reminded that history – whether seen from above or from below – is in a continual state of flux, change and development and that every issue in dispute arises not from chance but from circumstances that may be logically and coherently defined and explained. Why, for example, was there so little collective protest in 1789, a year of shortage and near-famine and widespread hoarding of grain by rich farmers and merchants? Because, quite simply, the biological factor intruded and people were too much weakened by hunger to engage in violent physical activity. Further, why did food riots virtually cease after 1848? Because they became progressively more redundant as the state increased its control over a national market. And why, again, in the later nineteenth century, did labour disputes tend to become focused on a firm-by-firm basis against individual concerns? Because capital became concentrated in larger local units.

And (to ask a more fundamental question) why did the nature, the forms and issues of "contention" change so substantially around the year 1850, thus dividing the whole 350-year span into two distinctive stages of struggle? Because (the author replies) the first stage was dominated by the determined efforts of the State to extract resources – especially resources for making war – often at the expense of capitalist development, and the second stage by the accommodation of capitalist property within the framework of a strong and supportive State, thus broadly subordinating the untold struggle of labour against capital for the older forms of protest, like tax strikes, food riots, charivaris, and sporadic rebellions, which had now become redundant. Thus, Tilly concludes, "by the actions that authorities call disorder, ordinary people fight injustice, challenge exploitation, and claim their own place in the structure of power".

I have only three faults of any substance to find with Tilly's book. One is that, though he gives a fairly rigorous Marxist-style definition of capitalist production, labour power and (less explicitly) of wage labour, he appears to use the terms more loosely as the volume proceeds. Second, Lyon, with its quite unique industrial structure and experience between the 1740s and 1830s, is almost entirely neglected during the all-important 1780s and 1790s. And, third, while including the ways in which people thought of themselves among his priorities for closer investigation, in practice Tilly gives the matter remarkably little attention. In short, popular ideology – as opposed to the triad of interest, organization and opportunity – as in his earlier book, *Rebellious Century*, still remains a somewhat shadowy weapon in Tilly's armoury.

Steven Laurence Kaplan and Cynthia J. Koop have edited a collection of historical essays by eighteen scholars mostly presented at a 1983 Cornell University conference, under the title *Work in France: Representations, meaning, organization, and practice* (567pp. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; available in the UK from International Book Distributors. \$22.50; paperback, \$7.95. 0 8014 1697 3).



# Mastering the irrational

Jasper Griffin

MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM  
*The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy*  
 561pp. Cambridge University Press. £35 (paperback, £12.95).  
 0521 257689

The subject of this long and closely written book (small type and large pages—561 of them) is an ambitious one: an investigation of the role played by luck in the area of human excellence and the activities associated with it. That means the whole nexus of questions about the role in moral thinking and in the good life of all those elements which cannot be reduced to rationality: external relationships such as love, friendship, political activity, attachment to possessions; and internal drives of a non-rational kind, the appetites, feelings, passions and needs. Martha Nussbaum develops a coherent argument as she goes through a range of Greek writings from the tragedians to Aristotle, which is worked out with great energy and force, and which makes the reader think hard about familiar texts and see them in new and very interesting lights. It is a prominent feature of the book that the author is not concerned only with a dispassionate exposition of ancient documents. On the contrary, she sees them as still morally illuminating, offering insights which are concealed in our conventional post-Kantian thinking. "We have discovered that we do live in the world that Aristotle describes", is her conclusion, and these Greek authors can help us to see how to understand and live in that world.

It is clearly true of human life that we are to a great extent at the mercy of external events and internal drives, and yet that we aspire, in a way and at least for some of the time, to live in accordance with reason. The Greeks were intensely conscious of the tension. Plato, with his unflinching fearlessness of argument, made determined and consistent attempts to reduce to zero the power of the irrational, both from without and from within. The Socrates of dialogues like the *Phaedo* is completely detached from external needs: uninterested in possessions, physically ascetic, shoeless, tough and independent. He also, as we see in the *Symposium*, is impregnably armoured against even the strongest temptations of sensuality. "No man ever saw Socrates drunk", and a determined assault on his virtue by the glamorous Alcibiades leaves the philosopher unmoved in his ironical superiority.

In the *Republic* Plato embeds this attitude in

an elaborate system of metaphysics, which serves as the framework for a whole planned society: a society immune to chance, passion and change. The *Republic* insists on the suppression of the desires, except for privileged ones which relate to knowledge and truth: asceticism is to be the rule of society, where all is ordered and there is no room for chance. It is cardinal to the *Symposium* that all the objects of desire, which seem so different from each other, are in reality examples of the same single system of values. Seen in the true perspective, art and mathematics are really one, and so are physical love and political theory: there can be no incompatibility or conflict between any of them. The highest levels of abstract thought are also the most intense of pleasures. All aspirations and all desires tend, in reality, to the same end. Thus the *Symposium* goes even further than the *Republic* in removing the possibility of moral conflict. True values cannot be in conflict with each other; in fact, they are all interchangeable. The agony of the tragic hero, Hamlet or Orestes, is thus ruled out; and, quite consistently, Plato condemns and rejects the works of the tragedians.

There were of course people in the ancient world, as there are in the modern, who took the opposite course. Some said that happiness simply was good luck, nothing else; others that the only thing of value was pleasure. These people are not well represented in what survives of early literature, and it seems that only after Aristotle did a systematic philosophical hedonism come into existence. This view is hardly discussed in the present work.

Many scholars now find Plato's views repulsive or bizarre, and in some influential recent works he has taken a severe pounding. We want to insist on the variety of values, not all reducible to the same coin and interchangeable with each other, and on a greater importance of individual relationships and personal affections than seems to be allowed by this great theorist of love, who talks far more about the subject than modern philosophers do, yet who seems to regard it as a means rather than an end: a way of raising the soul to levels of vision and understanding which it cannot reach without the stimulus of passion, but which essentially are solitary and incommittable.

Professor Nussbaum shows more sympathy and more understanding of the Platonic position than it often receives. There is something in the human heart to which the Platonic demand for simplicity, clarity and independence makes a strong appeal. It will not do to dismiss it as merely eccentric. But it is possible to see how Plato's one-sided emphasis on this side of our nature can be redressed, without sinking into undistinguished blandness. She offers us a

wide and synoptic account, which shows Plato first reacting against the views of the tragic poets, then himself developing in a more human and less ascetic direction. Finally the marvellous sanity of Aristotle restores the true balance between pure reason and passionate feeling, recognizing that neither is sufficient alone, but that rational moral choice involves both. Thus the reality of moral conflict, the clash of good with good, the importance of emotion and suffering over mistaken or constrained actions—all the elements vital to tragedy that Plato rejected are brought back by Aristotle. It is consistent with this that Aristotle was a great admirer of tragedy, keenly interested in the subject, and concerned to establish its intellectual respectability and significance after the Platonic denial.

This is an engrossing account and an important book. Its scope is very wide, in a world in which it has become sadly unusual for a scholar to tackle both tragedy and philosophy in a single work. It contains detailed discussions of two plays, the *Antigone* and the *Hecuba*, and it is prepared to tackle every aspect of the works it discusses, from the date and historical context of Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* to the real meaning of Aristotle's theory of catharsis (not purgation in the medical sense but "cognitive clarification").

It certainly contains things which will not command universal agreement. Probably the part most unlikely to be generally accepted is the discussion of the *Phaedrus*. This dialogue departs to some extent from the ascetic and self-controlled picture of love which, on the surface at least, characterizes the *Symposium*; it salutes madness as divine and a necessary part of human well-being. Whereas in earlier works of Plato desires were generally regarded as entirely bad, irrational distractions from the life of reason, in the *Phaedrus* they are granted an important role in the guidance of the soul. Coolness is now not enough. It is the view of this book that Plato here reinstates as central to successful living an erotic passion for a unique individual, studied in his uniqueness for his own sake and not as a means to an end: through shared experience and shared emotional struggle the soul learns and transcends itself. This reflects the profound impression made on Plato by his love for Dion, an impression confirmed by the great philosopher's verse epigrams. It is a comparatively small point that scholarly opinion has been convinced, ever since 1963, that none of these poems is genuine, though it is a surprise to find no mention of the view of Sir Denys Page in his magisterial edition of 1981: "Not one of these epigrams can be accepted as the work of Plato."

More important is that the view of love in this dialogue is less different, and less modern, than Nussbaum suggests. Love is still primarily "love of beauty", which is only embodied in the beloved person, and which enables the lover to rediscover and recapture the beauty which he knew before his birth; and the ways which the lover learns and imitates are not really those of the beloved but those of the patron god or goddess whom they both follow. The coolness of the *Symposium*, too, can be exaggerated: the atmosphere of the gathering described in the dialogue is electric with erotic tension. Alcibiades says to the company, "You have all shared in the madness and ecstasy of philosophy", and the stimulus of passion is necessary to the ascent of the Platonic ladder of perception and revelation.

Generally speaking it is right for scholars to write in a dryish tone. Embarrassment rather than inspiration is the effect produced, I suppose, by most scholarly books which seek to convey feelings along with the footnotes. This book is among the exceptions: a learned work which succeeds in communicating the urgency of the writer's feelings and the importance of her subject. Nussbaum's interest in the style of philosophical discourse, as well as its substance, adds depth to her discussions. At moments the reader feels that the pull of modernity has slightly distorted the shape of the ancient texts, especially on questions concerned with women (though here too there are some very interesting discussions). It is sad that so sensitive a scholar has felt obliged to sprinkle her pages with "he or she": "to opt for 'he' everywhere seemed repugnant to my political sensibilities". It can only be with a heavy heart that the reader confronts a sentence like this (an uncharacteristic horror, it should in fairness be said): "The lovers' problem will arise for anyone who doubts that the external movements, gestures and speeches of his or her limbs, trunk, face, genitals, always fully and adequately express the person that [s]he feels himself or herself to be." And there is a quaintness about the compulsion which the author feels to let us know that she dissents from Plato's contemptuous attitude towards passive male homosexuals: "I'd like to leave no doubt that I dissociate myself from the social prejudices shown. . .". She herself points out that even Aristotle failed to achieve rationality in this area: "This judicious fair-minded man . . . shows us the tremendous power of sexual convention. . . in shaping a view of the world."

That her own book, formidably intelligent and persuasively emotional, shares a blind spot of Aristotle as well as some of his virtues: that is a price which, in this imperfect world, she, and we, must be happy to pay.

the arguments which are contained in or implied by the ancient texts, and to assess them in relation both to the debates which formed their original context and to modern controversies.

*The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic ethics*, edited by Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker, represents a joint undertaking of just such a kind. It contains the papers presented at the third in a series of international conferences on Hellenistic philosophy; those of the previous two appeared as *Doubt and Dogmatism* (1980) and *Science and Speculation* (1982). The three volumes together are evidence of another significant change which has occurred in the study of Greek philosophy in recent years, namely the revival of interest in what came after Aristotle. This second change is largely explained by the first, as is nicely illustrated by T. H. Irwin's paper in the present collection. Irwin begins by quoting Bentham: "I had not completed my thirteenth year, when at Queen's College, Oxford, the task was imposed on me . . . of rendering into English that work of Cicero which is known by the title of *The Tusculan Questions* or *Tusculan Disquisitions*. Pain, I there learnt, was no evil. Virtue was, and is, of itself sufficient to confer happiness on any man who is disposed to possess it on these terms. What benefit, in any shape, could be derived from impregnating the memory with such nonsense? What instruction from a self-contradictory proposition, or any number of any such propositions?"

"Other readers", Irwin comments, "have been less vehement but equally firm in their rejection of these central Stoic doctrines, agreeing

that the Stoics have nothing to say on these issues that is both interesting and plausible." He then proceeds to an elegant demonstration that their position in fact stands comparison with Aristotle's, to which (contrary to the claims of one recent writer) he sees them as directly responding; although his final verdict is that "the Stoic criticisms of Aristotle should encourage us to believe that Aristotle's strategy is essentially sound".

We might not get anything from "impregnating the memory" with the Stoic paradoxes—Bentham's phrase eloquently expresses what he expected to get from reading Cicero—but if Irwin's reconstructions are even half right, there is more than enough philosophical work going on behind them to merit our attention. The same story is told by other essays in the collection: Michael Frede on the Stoic treatment of ordinary emotions, as "irrational motions of reason"; Jacques Brunschwig on the "cradle" argument (ie, the attempt to justify moral doctrines by reference to the behaviour and psychology of the child—Brunschwig also discusses the use of the same type of argument by the Epicureans); Troels Engberg-Pedersen, especially on how the Stoic sage would come to "discover the good"; and Striker, on the various different formal definitions which Stoics offered of the goal of life.

Of three papers specifically on Epicurus, two portray him as the very model of a sober philosopher: Malte Hossenfelder proposes a striking new way of reconciling his stated views

about the final good, while David Furley reflects on his case against the fear of death. Martha Nussbaum, in the other, paints him more as the leader of a fringe sect, who recommends the memorization of key doctrines, confession and informing, and who finds value in an argument only in proportion to its therapeutic effect. (Each of the two pictures is perhaps as true as the other.) Epicurus too, according to Nussbaum, is criticizing Aristotle; and again Aristotle comes off best. In the book's first paper, Julia Annas reviews the differences between ancient and modern sceptical strategies.

All the papers are useful, some distinguished; and the general richness of the fare they offer more than outweighs the inevitable unevenness between them in terms of style and readability. The editors have unfortunately allowed one contribution (Hossenfelder's) to escape with key terms and passages in untranslated Greek or Latin, which unnecessarily restricts its readership in relation to the rest. But this is a small blemish on a fine book.

The purpose of *The Greek City States: A source book* by P. J. Rhodes (266pp. Croom Helm, £19.95, 0 7099 2222 1) is "to present the world of Greek city states, through a selection of ancient texts in translation, to students of ancient Greece and to students of political institutions". There are chapters on the Homeric and Archaic states, and on the major cities of Sparta and Athens.

# Irony of ironies

John Lucas

TERRY EAGLETON  
*Against the Grain: Selected essays 1975–1985*  
 199pp. Verso. £18.95 (paperback, £5.95).  
 0 86091 134 9

In an essay here called "The Idealism of American Criticism", Terry Eagleton compares the state of literary theory in America and in England. His conclusion is that they manage these things far better in the United States. Raymond Williams was "only in his very early writing a 'literary critic'", and if you leave him aside who, apart from Frank Kermode and George Steiner, can be set against "Ransom, Poulet, Krieger, Hirsch, de Man and Bloom (to give a mere handful of salient names)"? An English reader's first response to this is likely to be one of rueful agreement. The second will be in all probability involve the search for an explanation. America is simply bigger and so has more of everything, including literary theory. Besides, it is easier for American academics to discover funding bodies who will give them the leisure and money they need if they are to write.

And at this point the reader may well be pulled up short. For of course what Eagleton is essentially talking about is literary theory as an academic pursuit. In other words, he tacitly accepts a particular kind of institutionalizing of such theory. This may seem unfair. After all, in the essay "Liberalism and Order: The criticism of John Bayley", he attacks the double life of certain well-known members of English academies whose "racy iconoclasm" as literary journalists "contrasts tellingly with the bland caution of their scholarly productions". But then such academics aren't theorists: "Intellectual seriousness is reserved for the editing of texts; criticism functions as a little light relief from such sober enterprises." I do not suggest that Eagleton would prefer that the editing of texts should be light relief; but he certainly sees theory as a sober enterprise. It is this which

leads him to promote academic literary theory at the expense of any other, this which is the justification for being an academic. And the narrowing of focus involved in this becomes apparent once you realize that he takes no account of, among others, Jack Lindsay, John Berger or Adrian Stokes, all of whom in the course of their working lives have advanced theoretical statements which are of considerably more value than those associated with the frequently modish names whose work is examined in *Against the Grain*.

Eagleton is one of a number of critics and theorists on the left who have necessarily drawn attention to improper or at least ideologically-based privileging of certain authors and texts. Yet his own procedure, while scrupulously critical of the authors he writes about, nevertheless privileges them because it takes for granted their ultimate worth. The first essay in this collection is on the work of "Macherey and Marxist Literary Theory". But Macherey's theory of the text seems far less fruitful than Jack Lindsay's, as that is worked out in much of his writing. And one does not have to agree with Donald Davie's politics or his view of Pound to think that his *Extra Pound: Poet as sculptor*, which makes excellent use of some of Adrian Stokes's ideas, is more deeply suggestive about problems to do with modernism than is the work of Frederic Jameson, to which Eagleton devotes a good deal of space. Perhaps neither Lindsay nor Davie is theoretical enough for Eagleton, but it is difficult to see in what ways the abstractions of Macherey and Jameson are of much use in grappling with the nature and status of literary texts. Thus Eagleton's essay "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism" takes its cue from a remark of Jameson's, and as a result gets into all kinds of difficulty. According to Jameson, "modernism was born at a stroke with mass commodity culture". Eagleton's argument, conducted it must be said with exemplary clarity, is that modernist writers wish to "fend off" reduction to commodity-status, but the very ways in

which they strive to become unavailable or unassimilable make it possible for them to be turned into "commodity as fetish". Postmodernism is then the acceptance of this fetishism, and indeed postmodernist art actively conspires in accepting its "ephemeral function" as "this or that act of consumption".

An initial problem with this argument is that mass commodity culture begins well before modernism. What else was Ruskin writing about in *The Nature of Gothic* or Veblen characterizing as conspicuous consumption? Far from placing modernism securely within history, as Eagleton seems to think, Jameson's approach is nearly as vague and idealist as (say) Wellek's theory of Romanticism. So is Eagleton's, because it depends on an entirely abstract claim that modernist art is identifiable through its ironic withdrawal, its would-be refusal of its commodity status. At one point he becomes uneasy over this and, with Brecht in mind, says that there "is indeed a political modernism . . . but it is hardly characteristic of the movement as a whole". (My italics.) This begs the question of whether there is any such movement, rather than a number of works and authors which, as Alfred Kazin has recently suggested, have been given undue prominence. It is also decidedly odd. For who comprises this movement? Yeats? Eliot? Pound? Lawrence? Eagleton may not like their politics but to deny that they were often overtly political seems taking things too far.

This then leads to a further problem. For it can hardly be argued that all these writers, always, operate from a position of ironic withdrawal. Yeats's poetry, in particular, can more usefully be described as an act of intervention, his art as insistently social and responsible. Probably much the same could be said for other modernists. But it is impossible difficult to know how Eagleton would respond to this because his own procedure is so abstract that for him "the modernist text" is an undifferentiated whole, characterized by certain qualities which, on inspection, seem of no use at all in

helping us decide whether, for example, one part is better than another. Eagleton might retort that to introduce questions of value here is to reveal a mere liberal, impressionistic bias. There are, (to adapt Adorno, different scars but all are wounded. Differences may be described but not evaluated.

But then Eagleton has an excellent essay on "Form, Ideology and *The Secret Agent*" in which he identifies its self-contradictory character as arising from "the internal conflicts of the Conradian ideology—a form of 'meta-physical' conservatism equally hostile to petit-bourgeois myopia and revolutionary astigmatism". And that he doesn't think we should be neutral about this is clear from another essay, "The Critic as Clown", where he remarks that "a nineteenth-century irrationalist current . . . emerges at its most disreputable in such writers as Conrad". Once made this kind of distinction and you cannot securely hold on to Jameson's totalizing claim that we are all postmodernists now. (And again, of course, the uselessly vague nature of the claim makes it impossible to know what postmodernist works are like, and therefore which works we can argue are not postmodernist.)

As it happens, Eagleton sidesteps many of the problems he sets himself, partly out of genuine intellectual nimbleness, partly by not stopping for an answer, and partly because his way of writing makes it difficult to be sure where he actually stands on any particular issue or argument. In his spy tribute to William Empson, he remarks that "irony" is the device whereby the modern bourgeois critic can at once collude with and privately disown the ideological imperatives of the modern state". I do not know whether he would want those words to apply to himself, but there is something ironic about calling your collection *Against the Grain* and then characterizing your ideological opposite, John Bayley, as exercising power "in a literary world where others of his sensibility and 'social tone' are undoubtedly marginal". Marginal to what?

# Long vacation pastorals

Hermione Lee

W. W. ROBSON  
*A Prologue to English Literature*  
 254pp. Batsford. £12.95 (paperback, £4.95).  
 07134 1891 5

How should we read *The Faerie Queene*? Professor Robson will advise. "The Roche and Phillips edition, slowly perused over a long vacation, is the best for the general reader who has somehow 'never got round' to reading the famous poem." A comfortable prospect opens up of an infinity of long vacations, with Robson as our affable companion, while the "general reader" with no long vacations at his disposal shuffles off into outer darkness, his Spenser still unread.

Safe in the study, meanwhile, we are learning the essential truths about the established canon: that Chaucer is "above all a creator of characters", that Swift "uses irony as an attacking weapon" and that what makes *Gulliver's Travels* "a classic" is "the fertility of his comic invention", that we cannot miss Jane Austen's "lemon flavour" and that Yeats "spells still work for many readers". Of Shakespeare, we are told that "he never wrote anything better than the Balcony scene", that *Measure for Measure* is "disappointing", that "our hearts are with Falstaff", that "the amusing portrait of Polonius" is "drawn with the incisiveness of Jane Austen". To put us in touch with the real world, there are up-to-the-minute comparisons—Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* with the *Gulag Archipelago*, the War in Heaven in *Paradise Lost* with Walt Disney, Elizabethan airs and madrigals with pop songs: "Will Bob Dylan or the Beatles last as long as the best of these?" There are jokes, too:

[Jonson and Inigo Jones's] association broke up in a quarrel. To a twentieth-century observer the great likeness in appearance between Inigo Jones and Ezra Pound may do something to explain this.

*News from Nowhere* brings a poet's vision to imagining what a classless society might be like, though as

Americans often suppose they have one already the book may leave them cold.

Molly Bloom's famous interior monologue . . . goes on much too long in proportion to the chief fact about human nature it has to reveal, viz. that women can't punctuate.

Robson, as these jokes suggest, has his preferences. Dr Johnson is his model ("His style is carefully balanced and solid. Every sentence carries a punch. There is no drive!") and the eighteenth century seems to please him best. His "great tradition" has its eccentricities. At the start of the Victorian period he gives pride of place to Macaulay and Frodip; during it, he finds room for William Winwood Reade and Winthrop Mackworth Praed, but not for such

women writers such as Harriet Martineau, Margaret Oliphant, Charlotte Yonge or Mrs Humphry Ward. At its end he brings in some odd favourites—Ronald Knox, Meade Falkner, Maurice Baring. The climactic figure in his treatment of the twentieth century is Winston Churchill. But he leaves out Samuel Beckett (referred to in passing as "the Irish-Parisian"), David Jones, Siegfried Smith, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, Somerville and Ross, Rebecca West, Rosamond Lehmann and Jean Rhys. It will be noticed that most of these are women. The "alternative canon" to which Robson vaguely and condescendingly refers (as in "Mary Shelley is now getting much attention from the Women's Movement") seems not to have made much impression.

"Modern" (and especially American) criti-

cism is his abhorrence; he is not benign when he complains about "the disordered garbage that passes today for thought", or the risibility of contemporary fiction ("To-day . . . it is taken for granted that all novels should be entertainments—except when they are interminable 'protests', long, sincere, and intermittently intelligible, by Latin-Americans"), or the horrors of "political" British drama. ("Is this literature? Will these plays be read in a few years' time? We don't learn which plays.")

It is hard to say what is most pernicious about this smug and stuffy book. Of course a survey is a difficult thing to do (though it has been done much more reliably by Harry Blamires in his *Matthew Short History of English Literature*, and much more interestingly by Peter Conrad in his expensive, eccentric *Everyman survey*). The antiquated chunterings and complacent platitudes might be negligible if they didn't conjure up a vision of hopeful, obedient students all over the world, from Peking to Lagos, copying out that Virginia Woolf's novels are "rather tame", or that Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* is "extraordinarily unconvincing", or that *Notre-Dame* "South American setting and characters are not very memorable". Worst of all, the book panders to ignorant assumptions about "difficult" or "boring" writers. Donne's "characteristic fault" is "over-complexity", Blake's long poems are for "cranks", the "Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline drama is on the whole mostly inert", Wordsworth's "The Idiot Boy" and "The Thorn" "don't really come off", and "it is impossible not to have sympathy with young students in the twentieth century who have to struggle through *Middlemarch*". Or who light on this as their guide.

# On Independence and Resolution

The man next door snores in Portuguese.  
 He keeps me awake all night, then doesn't speak  
 When he hands me your letter in the morning.  
 What would be the point? I could only smile  
 Like a door closing quietly, if he did.

Bells drag their shadows across the sand  
 To a glimmer of children. You will not know  
 The pain I feel when I read her name  
 Mentioned carelessly, so many times.  
 I will wish you both well and send my love:

Some nights I dream of what led me here; how I feared  
 The woman who walked up a road to a shuttered house.  
 I love the wind comes of rigging in the harbour:  
 When the tide comes in, the sea is always warmer;  
 And your smile does not curve into a key.

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# Hurting you, hurting me

Nicola Shulman

JENNY DISKI  
Nothing Natural  
239pp. Methuen. £9.95.  
0413-411702  
PATRICIA BARRIE  
Devotions  
224pp. Chatto and Windus. £9.95.  
07011-30296

"That which will bring to life in a woman the most tumultuous sensations, that which will upset her organisation most effectively will decidedly procure for her the greatest possible amount of pleasure." Although sado-masochism is the subject of Jenny Diski's novel *Nothing Natural*, the Marquis de Sade, whose pleasure-principle is quoted above, would not have been remotely interested in any part of it. Diski's protagonist, Rachel, is certainly no Sadean heroine: neither virtuous nor especially lubricious (to use Sade's preferred term), she is an attractive, confident divorcee living with her young daughter, teaching remedial pupils and enjoying occasional sex unencumbered by guilt or sentiment. Rachel holds the controlling interest in her own life; her organization is quite undisturbed until she embarks on an affair with Joshua.

Joshua, despite his cosy appearance, is a sexual sadist, and during the course of her protracted but intermittent relationship with him, Rachel (and Diski, whose voice is indistinguishable from that of her heroine) has ample time to brood on Sade's maxim. She finds, in fact, that for a woman to have her organization overturned in this way is to find herself on the path towards an abject and servile existence. Whatever pleasurable intensities are offered on the way are bought at the cost of independence, even sanity. Rachel's obsession with Joshua plunges her into a deep depression; losing control, she soon discovers that the humiliations and dependencies she has learned between the sheets have leaked out under the

bedroom door and begun to colour the other parts of her life. She tries to commit suicide. At the mercy of Joshua in bed, she is shortly at the mercy of doctors, psychologists and the health system. We can see where this is pointing, and a loosely connected subplot about a sad remedial pupil further develops the implication that sado-masochism provides a metaphor for society's treatment of the marginal (women, remedial pupils etc) and the powerless (sexually obsessed women, remedial pupils, etc).

Refuting Sade's conclusions thus, Diski also rejects his methods. The incidences of sado-masochistic sex are widely spaced, and the treatment is domestic in the extreme: all sexual congress occurs in the kitchen and bedroom of Rachel's London flat, and modern Joshua, a minimalist sadist, restricts his paraphernalia to a single strap, which he produces, rather humoursly, from a Harrods carrier bag. This relentless courtship of normality is intended to be both a foil to the strangeness and violence of the act, and an indication of how dark and brutal desires exist among our ordinary psychological furniture.

This is doubtless true, but Diski has achieved realism at the expense of interest. The most successful books on the subject of obscure sexual practices succeed not by denying their abnormality but by emphasizing it. The elaborate setting and minuscule detail of *120 Days of Sodom*, *The Story of O* or Edward Selton's *The New Epicurean* (1740) are not merely decorative. They are due to the recognition on the part of their authors that the most appropriate setting for a trip into the subconscious is a fantastic landscape. The lengthy and meticulous description, in *Sodom*, of the absurdly inaccessible fortress to which the fearsome foursome will repair with their entourage establishes that the victims won't escape their tormentors, but it also prepares the mind of the reader by leading it away from normality. Similarly, the violently formal diction characterizing these works furnishes a vocabulary for thinking about the unthinkable. Diski's writing, far from being elaborate, is casual to a

fault. She makes the fundamental mistake of promising in the narrative ("The conversation was amusing") what she fails to deliver in the dialogue ("Carol and I were together for fifteen years. I'm very involved with the kids, I'm usually around there in the early evenings and they stay with me once a week"), and she is inclined to express herself in the medium of received ideas and stock phrases. Although her tone, when she uses phrases like "shock-horror" or "getting on with life", implies a conspiratorial wink to the reader, a cliché—even one in invisible quotation marks—is still a cliché.

At best, Diski's prose is chattily readable, at worst it incorporates language that would be clumsy in a conversation at the launderette—like the horrible "literally": "Everything was grey—literally", "small, thin [men] left her cold, literally" and, worst of all, "she felt drugged, literally" (she is not drugged). Not very good at telling the facts, she fares even worse with simile: during a sex scene, Rachel, swallowing semen, "took it into her like some life-giving liquid". Literally, surely?

If Diski had paid more attention to her prose, or tried to convey the strange nature of her heroine's predicament instead of concentrating all the mystery on Joshua who, coming and going in the night with his carrier bag, is too much of a stranger to generate any real interest, this book would have been a great deal better in every respect.

By contrast, the careful, often beautiful writing in Patricia Barrie's first novel *Devotions* captures attention and admiration on the first page and retains it throughout. *Devotions* also tells a sado-masochistic story of a sort, but one which takes as its text not the demonstrable subjections of the masochist but the dependence, greater and more pitiful by far, of the sadist on his victim. The book has two alternating narratives, that of Max Knighton, fluent, urbane, selfish and, since the death of his wife, a profoundly unhappy man, and that of his stammering, uncertain daughter Anna.

At the age of forty-nine, Max has suffered a

stroke. He cannot move his right arm and his powers of speech are reduced to a single meaningless syllable. His narrative, a powerfully articulate internal monologue, sifts through the events of his life with his daughter, deliberating on and analysing his brutality towards her, sometimes gloating, sometimes regretting what he has made her, often cursing God. Max believes God to take the same pleasure in denying him as he has done in denying Anna, and his rantings at Him exhibit a petulance reminiscent of Herbert's "The Collar". They are answered with the same grace. Anna also invokes their shared past, and the two narratives repeatedly touch and separate, moving, slightly out of step, towards the explanation of their unhealthy symbiosis. The explanation, when it comes, is not wholly unexpected, and so much the more one admires Barrie's delicacy in bringing it about.

Unlike those of *Nothing Natural*, the characters in this book are everything they are cracked up to be. Max is intelligent, charming, cruel, sad. He is also funny: "It is the way of women to blame themselves. Caught in the grip of cataclysmic forces, swallowed by earthquakes, raped by armies, one hears them muttering, 'It's my fault. If I hadn't married Gilbert and moved to Picton Street . . .'. During the course of the book, Barrie manipulates Max's single syllable in a way that makes it as expressive as a full vocabulary. The parts told by Max are more consistently good than those told by Anna; Barrie's imagination is fiercer in response to the more demanding subject.

A recent addition to the "Open Guides to Literature" series published by the Open University Press is Graham Holderness's volume on *Women in Love* (140pp. Open University Press. £12.50; paperback, £3.50. 0 335 15254 6). The author states that his intention is to offer "a selective guide to the novel's most important features and difficulties, and to demonstrate the operations of criticism" on the book widely regarded as Lawrence's masterpiece.

# In the Onegin line

Alan Hollinghurst

VIKRAM SETH  
The Golden Gate  
307pp. Faber. £9.95.  
0571 3967 1

The Pushkin stanza is a wonderfully self-renewing form. Fourteen lines long, it gathers together two kinds of quatrain and three couplets into tight units which are none the less full of movement and contrast, fleet and less architectonic than sonnets, the closure of the quatrains offset by the forward-moving couplets at the centre, and brought to epigrammatic poise by the couplet at the end. It is a form whose inner counterpoint gives it both gravity and levity, and it is hard to imagine a better vehicle for social verse narrative which aims to be both reflective and lightly comic. Its small but perceptible vogue in recent English poetry, boosted perhaps by Charles Johnston's acclaimed translation of *Eugene Onegin* in 1977, has not always reflected its particularly Pushkinian qualities: Peter Levi's *Ruined Abbey* (1968) set subject perversely at odds with medium; Andrew Waterman's *Out for the Elements* (1981), though full of lexical ingenuity, had too little narrative, too much bragging confession; John Fuller's *The Illusionists* (1980), on the other hand, a tale which exposed an innocent's progress through the machinations of the London art world, and centred on a forged Hogarth picture of *The Rape of the Lock*, reconnected the form to historic tradition, and exploited its potential for Byronic digression as well as Augustan concision.

Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*, a verse novel of modern Californian life over 8,000 lines long, is not so funny, or so digressive. It does not draw such attention to the difficulties of the stanza or make such ostentatious comedy of solving them: it raises a smile rather than a laugh. But it is a technical *tour de force*. Seth has gone as far as can be imagined towards ease of diction, and at its best his stanza seems an entirely natural medium, through which he moves, for page after page, with effortless fluency. To be sure, there is a certain amount of waxing, doffing and inditing, half-obsolete short cuts to rhymes or metrical evenness. And the main characters—griggish yuppie John, glamorous barrister Liz, gay, conscience-racked Ed, feminist sculptor Jan, sexy dropout Phil and his son Paul—tirelessly fill out short lines with their conveniently monosyllabic names: "Phil, don't / Defend her . . . 'John, I don't care greatly / whose side I'm taking'" is a typical exchange. Perhaps the air of manic sociability and bristling egos that results is a deliberate part of Seth's portrait of his adoptive California.

It is very hard in the end to say what one thinks of this book—except that such sharp-eyed and sophisticated talent can only go on to do something even more extraordinary; perhaps something which strikes more unhesitatingly to the heart of the matter.

# Weights-and-balances

Neville Shack

DEBORAH EISENBERG  
Transactions in a Foreign Currency  
214pp. Faber. £9.95.  
0571 137989

The stories in Deborah Eisenberg's *Transactions in a Foreign Currency* suggest a mood of quiet trauma. Making out in New York becomes extremely daunting for the single girl, whose fragility is her handicap as well as charm. These are studies—narrated by a voice almost totally consistent throughout—in shock and the search for some kind of fulfilment.

"Days" is the most intense piece, a series of fragments from a journal, full of bleak confessions, but also charting a path of self-affirmation. The narrator has stopped smoking and come to a certain discovery about herself as "a tiny weights-and-balances apparatus, rapidly disassembling on contact with oxygen". She owns up to insanity at a very early stage—not a particularly startling revelation in itself. The judgment is more significant for its stabilizing of a new frame of perception: Gogol's madman brooding at the YMCA, but with zanier impulses and a tolerance of lopsidedness. At times this solipsism borders on extreme self-pity; the emotions have been excavated from the depths of the psyche. But these bulletins on

Certainly there is something essential that goes unexplained behind this bizarre book. In a way it calls for more authorial intrusion à la Pushkin, more pointers to the author's relation with his material. Seth doesn't appear in *propria persona* until Chapter Four, when he has got Ed and Phil into bed together, and with slightly arch propriety steps forward to draw a veil over what they do. In Chapter Five he plays blandish homage to *Onegin* and Johnston ("Sweet-watered, fluent, clear, light, blithe") and records the horror of a publisher, met at a party, at the idea of a verse novel. But we would like Seth to socialize with us far more often. The sleekness of the whole accomplishment intensifies the enigma: why has he undertaken the project in the first place? What is it about these people that merits his or our extended attention?

The impetus seems to be partly satirical and polemical: the faddishness of Californian life is paraded and indulged; and the novel centres persuasively on an anti-nuclear protest and an eloquent speech made at a demonstration outside "Lungless Labs". It is also affectionate and romantic, with abundant descriptions of the beauty of the country and a sense of Californian *douceur de vivre*. The characterization of Phil is the most inward and interesting, as he looks back with pain on a marriage a year dead, answers his little boy's questions, follows his own heart and mind into rejection of Reaganite society and into two love affairs. And there are passages of real poignancy about the deaths of one or two of the characters. Something rather disturbing and perhaps unintended happens, though, when all these concerns are treated in the ambiguous ethos of the Pushkin stanza, especially if the author abstains from his role as guide and prompt. The effect is in part of an up-market version of Cyra McPadden's *The Serial*, of scintillating technique brought to bear on evidently banal material, of soap transmogrified. Yet at the same time the verse, for all its suavity, seems to trap its protagonists in artificial attitudes, serving them up in a light *blancquette* of general and motiveless irony. It is by no means the same as writing in prose. Time and again in *The Golden Gate* one sees how the form has prevented the subtlety, the economic naturalness of prose narrative, and in turn invested everything that is described with an air of faint but irreducible fatuity. Just as they are made to matter one discovers that one doesn't care about Seth's characters after all.

It is very hard in the end to say what one thinks of this book—except that such sharp-eyed and sophisticated talent can only go on to do something even more extraordinary; perhaps something which strikes more unhesitatingly to the heart of the matter.

Other people, outside the author's first-person quarantine, tend to appear almost as phantoms. "What It Was Like, Seeing Chris" is set at a time of historical interest, and concerns the offering up of female virginity during a bad case of adolescence. Everything seems vulnerable, and the account has a nerve-jangled innocence about it which promises that nothing will be resolved. Chris himself fades in and out, a character fuzzily defined on the periphery, as the girl's plans relegate him just at the time when they might exalt his place in her life. "Plotsam" shows the particular lightness of New York's gravity, how dispensable most experiences there can be, but also how they might accumulate to thwart understanding between people. Charlotte, the central figure, finds living space in Cinder's apartment. Cinder is a lively, flighty girl who shuffles her pack of men; Charlotte, on the other hand, remains shy and apprehensive, trying to read the insincerities of the male and pick herself up after a failed relationship. The story, rich in diffuse sentiments, moves along at a nice pace, the dialogue emphasizing quirks of character. And above all there is the author's distinctive manner of coaxing wisdom out of ingenuousness, which marks the entire collection.

# Shouting from the back yard

Sean French

CARLOS FUENTES  
The Old Gringo  
Translated by Margaret Sayers Peden and the author  
199pp. Deutsch. £8.95.  
0233 978623  
Where the Air Is Clear  
Translated by Sam Hileman  
376pp. Deutsch. Paperback, £4.95.  
0233 979379

Ambrose Bierce was a misanthrope, a nihilist, and America's most celebrated journalist. At the end of his career he decided not to fade away. In 1913, a bitter and beaten seventy-one-year-old, he lit out for Mexico and disappeared. Rumour has it that he joined Pancho Villa's revolutionary army and died in action the following year. Where history stops, the novel can begin: Carlos Fuentes's *The Old Gringo* takes up Bierce's story from the moment he crosses the Rio Grande with a suitcase containing two of his own books, a copy of *Don Quixote* and a Colt .44.

Fuentes clearly has only the most perfunctory interest in creating a plausible version of what might have happened. The "old gringo" (Bierce is never named: it is only through hints, allusions or reading the dust-jacket that we find out the truth) rides across the desert and stumbles on a revolutionary detachment in Chihuahua commanded by the self-styled General Tomás Arroyo. He has led a rising on the estate where he was born and brought up as a virtual slave. The landowners have fled, but Harriet Winslow, the prim American school-teacher they had hired, remains stubbornly behind. The general refuses to accept Bierce as a recruit until the old gringo demonstrates improbable skill with his revolver.

This novel is crammed with incident, much of it of the most melodramatic kind. We are told frequently that the old gringo has come to Mexico to die. He rides into battle with Arroyo's troops and performs acts of astonishing bravery, but he is not killed. Meanwhile Harriet Winslow is cured of her inhibitions in the course of a love affair with the virile General Arroyo. The tale reaches a predictably violent conclusion, and as in many a western only the woman survives to return to civilization.

But what is the book really about? Bierce wonders himself: "Was he here to die or to write a novel about a Mexican general and an old gringo and a Washington schoolteacher lost in the deserts of northern Mexico?" *The Old Gringo* is about Ambrose Bierce the man, but it also makes sophisticated use of his literary and political career. The form of the novel alludes to Bierce's celebrated short story, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", about a Confederate soldier being hanged from a bridge during the American Civil War. He feels the rope break and the story details his escape and journey across country. Finally he reaches home, but as he runs towards his wife everything goes black and he dies, swinging from the bridge. The whole story has taken place in his mind at the moment of his death.

Fuentes hints that this novel may be taking place in similar fashion in Bierce's mind as he dies. To complicate matters, the story is also unfolding in the confused memory of Harriet Winslow, reliving the events many years later in her Washington, DC, walk-up apartment. He is in her dream, but she is in his dream as well.

For the Mexicans, their country is all too real, and there are vivid evocations in this book of desert, heat and smells. But Mexico is also present as a state of mind, a subject of fantasy. Harriet Winslow and Bierce both enter Mexico as carefully delineated representatives of imperialism, with disdain for this primitive, chaotic country in the United States' back yard. Much in *The Old Gringo* is muddy, even on a second reading, but the anti-Americanism is clear enough. As Bierce puts it to Harriet, with the author's obvious approval,

remember how we killed our Redskins and never had the courage to fornicate with the squaws and at least create a half-breed nation. We are caught in the business of forever killing people whose skin is of a different color. Mexico is the proof of what we could have been, so keep your eyes wide open.

This is a curious novel, alternately whimsical and immensely impressive. The vitality and virtuosity of Fuentes's narrative—in this superb translation, something like Jack London rewritten by Borges—are breathtaking. This is a story composed of fragments: moments of violence, passion or revelation, captured in memories and dreams. In other hands the effect could have been diffuse and boring, but Fuentes gives it the strange solidity of a fable. Yet much of the characterization—the demure schoolteacher, the macho rebel leader with "his uneasy sex, never restless"—is crude caricature. And the real subject of the novel, Mexico itself, which, we are told, redeems Bierce (compensating him "with a life: the life of his senses, awakened from lethargy by his proximity to death"), remains in the background.

It's only when one turns to Fuentes's first book, *Where the Air Is Clear* (first published in 1960 but appearing now in English for the first time), that we see fully what Mexico means to him. And if *The Old Gringo* seems starved of characters, perhaps it's because Fuentes used a career's worth of them in his first novel, a prodigious attempt to give Mexico its *Comédie Humaine* and *Ulysses* between the covers of one book. He tells the story of family after family—bankers, revolutionaries, artists, prostitutes, socialites—and, with flamboyant dexterity, weaves them together. At the heart of the book are two young men, Isca Cienfuegos and Rodrigo Pola, who are on a troubled quest to discover how they can live in this violent, impoverished country, a country which destroyed Rodrigo's father, Gervasio, a revolutionary, executed during the 1913 civil war (an event that obsesses Fuentes). Fuentes portrays much of his country with loathing: the squalor of Mexico City, the corruption, the political oppression. The novel's most troubling, complicated character is Federico Robles, once a revolutionary comrade of Gervasio's and now a successful banker. "Here there is only one choice," he tells the two young radicals, "we make the nation prosperous, or we starve." And if that means putting Mexico under the economic control of the United States, he is willing to pay that price.

Where the Air Is Clear (again, in an excellent translation) lacks the formal discipline of *The Old Gringo*, but it is attempting something more difficult and interesting, which is to embrace all sides of a country, ranging from the old Spanish Empire to the Aztec culture of the sun the Spanish found when they arrived, from capitalism to revolutionary socialism: "Mexico is the only world radically cut off from Europe which has to accept the fatality of Europe's complete penetration and use the European words for both life and death, although the being of her life and faith are of a different language."

Of course, all this proves difficult to resolve and the novel ends in a sort of mystical truce of affirmation and reconciliation. It does have its moments of shrillness, over-insistence or sentimentality, but is nevertheless a very exciting book, partly because it is written out of excitement for a great new subject. As one character puts it: "One does not explain Mexico. One believes in Mexico, with fury, with passion, and in alienation."

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# Saving the Ch'ing archives

Beatrice S. Bartlett

One morning in the mid-1970s I joined a group of Americans to observe classes at a secondary school outside Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. Displayed at the front of the eighth-grade history room was a full-colour wall map entitled "The Aggression of the Imperialist Powers all over the World". The map had nothing to do with the day's lesson; its silent accusation simply hung there, warning the students against their dangerous visitors. Within the year I came upon a similar map in a China mainland school. The coincidence is suggestive. Despite the much-touted political differences, strong similarities persist on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. One of them, the shared feeling about China's twentieth-century encounter with imperialism, has made its strength felt beyond the classroom.

The encounter has left its mark on the study of China's history, for in two of the three great discoveries of primary Chinese historical sources in the last century, foreigners took the lead, even to the extent of removing artefacts and manuscripts. Substantial numbers of oracle bones (used in divination rites in the second millennium BC), and Buddhist paintings, sculptures, and manuscripts from the caves of Turkestan – part of the route by which Buddhism reached China during the first millennium AD – now repose in collections outside China. The catalogues of those collections are written in English, French, German, Japanese and Russian, but not in Chinese. But the story of the third great primary source find – the archives of the last dynasty, the Ch'ing (1644–1911) – has been just the opposite. During the 1920s and 1930s, alert Chinese scholars forestalled major purchases of Ch'ing documents by foreign institutions. The Ch'ing archives were saved for Chinese, to be developed by the administrative vision and genius of Chinese curators. Foreigners are welcome, but as readers, not owners, of the documents.

Fittingly, the modern buildings which house the two strongest Ch'ing archival holdings reflect Chinese tradition. The Palace Museum in Taipei, built in 1965, has walls of the imperial colour, yellow, surmounted by a roof with characteristic Chinese upturned eaves. A similar fidelity to the past is reflected in the three six-storey modern buildings of Beijing's Number One Historical Archives of China. This complex was erected in 1975 on the western edge of the imperial palace, but its smooth cement walls end in traditional roofs. Both installations display other features of the Ch'ing palace style: flights of white marble balustrades, columns, and posts decorated with traditional motifs. Inside, a different sort of tradition is offered, in the form of a continuously available supply of boiling water for tea.

Paradoxically, today's division of Ch'ing documents between Beijing and Taipei has come about because of a strong reverence for tradition, in this case the tradition of state sponsorship of work on Chinese history. From early times, historical work was esteemed for the guide to moral action it was thought to provide, a very old idea that goes back to Confucius. "Praise-and-blame" history for the instruction of the ruling group became an important literary genre, dependent on the preservation of government archives. By the seventh century, the state had established a history office in which the state-sponsored dynastic histories were compiled from government archives. Today there are twenty-six such histories, covering more than two millennia, all the major and some of the minor dynasties of China. They were usually completed under the aegis of the succeeding dynasty, for which compilation of the official account became a powerful legitimizing symbol, attesting to possession of the cultural and historical vision necessary to rule China. Vestiges of this necessity survived into the twentieth century. When Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek moved to Taiwan in 1949, he ensured that his people would be able to produce their own official history of the Ch'ing by taking with him about six hundred crates of Ch'ing archives, including a substantial portion of History Office files. Although there had been a preliminary official Ch'ing history in 1927, Taiwan published its version in 1961. Meanwhile, the Beijing au-

thorities, not to be outdone, issued their set of all the major dynastic histories of the past and ensured that they would be able to write the history of their own preceding "dynasty" – the Republic (1912–49) – by dispatching collectors who fanned out all over China to retrieve materials scattered along the trail of Nationalist government migrations. These newly assembled papers have now been installed in the Number Two Historical Archives in Nanjing.

No one knows exactly how many Ch'ing archival documents survive. They are scattered among at least a dozen repositories, and despite the zeal of the archivists, a few have gone overseas. There is a large cache of 20,000 documents at the Public Record Office in London, including the famous Canton archive that was carried away in 1858 when the Chinese governor-general was captured during the Arrow War, as well as a rich miscellany of Chinese documents collected by the British legation in Peking between 1861 and 1939. Unless rumours of significant holdings in the Soviet Union are confirmed, this is probably the largest single deposit outside China. But a general guess of the survivors now in China might put the total at slightly more than ten million items – an "item" being any government document in one of the Chinese languages (chiefly Chinese and Manchu, but also Mongol, Tibetan and others), from a single short document of a few lines to a record book containing hundreds of pages of individual documents. The usual estimate is that 10 per cent of these are held in Taiwan, and the rest on the mainland. Materials from before the Ch'ing have not survived well. There may be about 5,000 remnants of the Ming (1368–1644); in addition I have seen a few T'ang (618–906) items rescued from the dry air of Turkestan. But the compilation of an official history usually ended with the destruction of the archives on which it had been based. The vast numbers of Ch'ing survivors attract scholars because they offer the only existing archival insight into the inner workings of an imperial Chinese government.

These millions of items are both varied and limited. Although one Chinese writer exulted, "There is nothing we do not have", that is not exactly the case. The archives were official, maintained by governments. Because the dynastic histories included biographies of high-level officials, biographical papers are heavily represented, but nearly all the materials reflect government interest; purely personal papers – memoirs, letters, poetry and drafts, for example – have to be sought elsewhere. Predictably, official statistics abound. There are figures which display government solicitude for popular welfare – monthly grain-price lists, weather reports measuring rain and snow, harvest reports – as well as other statistics on population and customs-post incomes. Grand Council recommendations on high policy decisions are scattered all through the papers – a set from 1734 details the positions of the hawks and doves on whether or not to renew the military campaign against the Mongols.

Indications of various imperial states of mind turn up in the form of holograph responses to provincial reports. Among these are several feet of letters from the eighteenth-century Yung-cheng Emperor to his favourite general in the north-west, as well as his swift denunciations of unfavoured imperial brothers. Including one tirade in Manchu that assured the recipients that they were as good as dead, using the Manchu word "dead" three times for emphasis. My favourite is his successor the Ch'ien-lung Emperor's response to a memorandum suggesting that, in accordance with the traditional Chinese belief in the connection between upright human conduct and harmony in the natural world, the emperor should take responsibility for a recent disastrous flood in Hupei. "If there has been a disastrous flood in Hupei, let the people of that locality look into themselves [for the misbehaviour that would throw nature off balance]". Ch'ien-lung scribbled, in a refreshing departure from the standard penitential reply. Another reaction suggests this emperor's sense of humour. To a provincial report which defended the lagging pursuit of a rebel band he appended a note: "Are we waiting for the bandits to commit suicide?"

Before I went to Taipei, even the condition of the documents was not well understood. I

was warned that Chinese archival materials were written in such a crabbed and scrawled calligraphy that I would find them unreadable. This proved not to be the case. In fact, most are inscribed in as handsome a script as the writer could muster – the aim being to impress the emperor. The materials are well preserved; both paper and ink of documents as much as 200 years old are in fine condition. Rarely is a smooth reading obstructed by water damage or decay. In early efforts to save the archives, various chemical sprays were used to counter the action of mildew, bugs and rot. Today, chemicals are no longer necessary: documents are laid to rest in camphor-lined boxes and stored in temperature-controlled vaults. The few documents in fragile condition are being mounted on acid-free paper.



Although I was eager to see for myself the treasures hidden in archival vaults, I had to wait until papers had been both arranged and announced in some kind of preliminary list before I could use them. In Taipei, accounting for documents at the end of the day was always carried out by two staff members; the rule was that no one went into the archives vault alone. The documents of Chinese tradition had to be carefully safeguarded. In keeping with this solicitude, they have been remarkably well catalogued. At the Palace Museum in Taipei, for instance, under the supervision of the German-trained director Dr Chiang Fu-tung, an index was produced during the 1970s which provides an entrée to the Museum's most valuable holding, its nearly 400,000 palace memorials (provincial reports to the throne). Each large card in the index has twelve lines for substantial summary, six lines for a verbatim copy of the imperial response, and additional notations concerning provenance, enclosures, and the document's publication history. The cards are filed chronologically in batches of a month; reading a series can give one an idea of the sequence and juxtaposition of events all over the empire. In addition, each memorial is also indexed under the name of its first author as well as under one of eighty-seven preset topics (to ensure standardization). Archives catalogues in the west are rarely so detailed or useful.

Because of Chiang Kai-shek's interest in History Office materials, the Museum fell heir to a much older, but similarly useful list, one of several created by Ch'ing archival curators in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is a list of names, originally designed to assist research on the official biographies for the dynastic history. Hand-copied in several hundred volumes, it runs chronologically, with each name entered under every date for which there was a relevant document.

Archival work demands a particular constellation of materials, reference works and scholars, and both Beijing and Taipei are rich in all three. At the end of my first month in Taipei I was lucky to find Mr Chao Chung-fu who, in addition to possessing the usual dazzling qualifications of a Chinese scholar, is also experienced in reading both archival materials and Chinese "grass writing" (the cursive form of writing), a skill particularly useful in deciphering imperial calligraphy. The Museum is also staffed with savants like Ch'ang P'i-te and Chuang Chi-fa who were always ready to drop everything to organize an informal committee to puzzle over an inscrutable piece of imperial calligraphy. Did he mean this or that? Is this character? or that one? They even displayed the highest mark of a true scholar, a willingness to admit something they did not know, unusual in a society in which "face" is so important.

Across the Taiwan Straits, the Number One Historical Archives in Beijing also offers a centre for Ch'ing studies, though of a different sort. Possessing by far the larger share of the materials, its first problem has been sorting, not indexing. The archivists of Beijing have been sorting their vast trove since 1925, when it was first established, after the last emperor had been evicted from the palace. At that point they were to have only ten hectic years before fear of the Japanese was to force them to crate nearly everything and haul it to the south-west for safe-keeping. Transport back to the coast after the war was part of a plan to remove both art treasures and archives to Taiwan, but at the last minute only a fraction of the 2,000 crates could be taken aboard the flotilla that sailed there. The rest were returned to Beijing.

At the Number One in the 1950s, under the influence of the Soviet model, a different archival classification scheme was set up when the small documents – perhaps around three million routine and palace memorials – were arranged by subject. Beijing archivists today lament this as a great mistake. But the subject arrangement is not an unreasonable one for a holding of this size. It is less cumbersome, and means that many boxes of individual documents are already grouped according to most researchers' interests. Taipei's cataloguing system would be unsuitable for an institution coping with nearly ten million items stored in seventeen vaults. The large subject groupings are a reasonable compromise, and those who use the museum benefit from thoughtful Ch'ing curatorship of long ago, when preservation was ensured by having duplicates and even triplicates hand-copied and proof-read. The survival of these records was also helped by the fact that during the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Enlai put archives beyond the range of the Red Guards' rampages against the "Four Olds".

On my first visit to the Number One in 1980 research assistants were not allowed; as a result I had to hand-copy whatever I anticipated needing later. There was also a requirement that all notes be described in detail (on forms that required a two-line summary for each note card) and presented for inspection before departure. These policies have subsequently changed and the Number One is now more user-friendly. Although the formality of note inspection still exists, simpler descriptions are now permitted. The Number One has also recently installed researcher services. These include assistants who may be engaged for reasonable fees to search and copy documents, as well as plentiful photocopying and micro-filming equipment. Using some of these services in a four-week stay in the fall of 1985 I was able to accomplish as much as I had in about four months in 1980–81, a welcome saving of time.

Beijing also boasts its own complement of fine scholars, including "Mr Archives", the venerable Shan Shikui who started work in 1925 and retired from active duty but not from active scholarship in 1984, and Ju Deyuan, who performs a valuable service by carrying out research on the collection itself. There is also a tie-in with local research institutes and archives and history departments that daily brings scholars to the Number One's spacious reading room. The publication program includes a journal devoted entirely to archival description and archive-based research; staff scholars also contribute to other journals. In the fall of 1985 the Number One's Director Yan Yongsheng told me that more improvements – a special catalogue room open to all, some published catalogues, and an easing of formalities – were in the offing. As a Chinese colleague, reflecting on Vice-premier Deng Xiaoping's recent generosity towards intellectuals, enthusiastically told me last fall, "Everything is going to get better and better."

Work on Ch'ing history is inestimably facilitated by the fact that instead of being dispersed all over the world, the majority of the documents are confined to two sites in China. Even though the Palace Museum and the Number One do not communicate directly with each other, either formally or informally, the housing of the major deposits in these two sites has ensured that both foreigners and Chinese can benefit fully from Chinese curatorship of this important resource of international scholarship.

# Letters

## Reassessing Foucault

Sir, – My review (June 6) of J. G. Merquior's *Michel Foucault* criticizes its excessive and incautious reliance on other commentators who share his adverse opinion of Foucault, and its claim that Foucault failed to answer factual objections to his work. Merquior responds (Letters, June 13) by charging me with failure to answer the authors he quotes, and by again citing one objection by Jacques Léonard to *Discipline and Punish* which, he claims, has never been answered.

Merquior's reproach against me happens not to be true, but its implications would be no less outrageous if it were. It is not the case that those who, like myself, have written favourably of Foucault's work are obliged to publish refutations of every attack which is made on it. Merquior chooses to endorse and repeat several such attacks. His suggestion that he is licensed to do this simply because he happens not to have read an answer to them is, I think, an accurate reflection of his intellectual standards.

Jacques Léonard suggested (*L'Impossible Prison*, p. 11) that Foucault had overlooked the possibility that the experiences of the French Revolution, the September Massacres and the Terror might have inspired a revulsion from public forms of punishment and a preference for imprisonment as the standard penal expedient. Merquior has now twice falsely asserted that Foucault evaded this "shrewd query". Shrewd it may be, but, as Foucault pointed out (*L'Impossible Prison*, p. 31), it does not account for the choice in 1791 by the Constituent Assembly of a prison-centred penal system, which preceded the Massacres by a year. My references show how little effort Merquior would have needed to make to find this reply.

Merquior asserts that none of his sources has attacked Foucault without "taking the trouble to refute him by adducing proper evidence". The question, of course, is whether Merquior has himself taken sufficient, or indeed any trouble to check the quality of this evidence.

Take his enthusiastic use of Peter Sedgwick's *Psycho Politics*. When I reviewed this book in the *TLS* (July 16, 1982), I pointed out that, among other drastic deficiencies, its purportedly erudite critique of Foucault had been based solely on a reading of the abridged English translation of *Histoire de la folie*, which omits over half of its text and nearly all its notes and references, and that adequate discussions of a series of topics whose neglect by Foucault Sedgwick alleged to be fatal to his historical thesis are in fact present in the full French edition.

These allegations, which Sedgwick himself largely took over from a previous polemicist, are now taken over by Merquior, who thus demonstrates not only his blind confidence in unreliable secondary authorities but also his failure to read the most indispensable primary material for his own book. An equally revealing, if trivial product of Merquior's scholarly technique is his suggestion that Foucault "picked up" the term "archaeology" after Michel Serres' description of *Histoire de la folie* in a review as an "archaeology of psychiatry". Merquior evidently does not know that Foucault had already used the term "archaeology of knowledge" in *Histoire de la folie*, in a passage omitted from the abridged translation. It ill befits such a commentator to hold forth on "the cool-headed control of interpretative hypotheses by means of those annoying objects once upon a time called 'facts'".

In my review I mentioned Foucault's concern with the legal safeguarding of rights and with the need to renew (not, as Merquior writes, to "review") the principle of the rule of law. Merquior calls these statements "bizarre", "weird", and a "pious misapprehension", suggests that they compromise my credibility as a reviewer, and adds for good measure that I "would do well fully to substantiate" them.

Such an invitation cannot well be refused, although Merquior might himself have done something to repair his ignorance on this matter before trumpeting it with such abandon. In *Power/Knowledge* I provided extensive bibliographic documentation of Foucault's efforts to resist the infringement of legal

constraints on the exercise of power and to expose the violation or compromise of their principles. At his death, *Le Monde* published a tribute by its legal correspondent to Foucault's inspiring influence in the early 1970s on the Syndicat des Magistrats. Foucault was, with Robert Badinter, probably the best-known influence of his generation in France for serious reform of the penal system and abolition of the death penalty, and the most forceful critic of policies designed to transform the judiciary into an organ of a security apparatus. Perhaps one may also mention here that he was one of the most active and prominent French supporters of Solidarity. In a recent memoir, Badinter records a discussion in which Foucault "stressed the need for a better appreciation, in a secular and multicultural society, of the importance and the architectural function of the rule of law, which transcends its purely normative meaning to act as a buttressing arch of the social edifice, itself sustained by opposing forces and thus ensuring the balance of the whole". At the time of Foucault's death, he and Badinter were planning the creation of an institution for research in this field.

Merquior's description of Foucault as an "anarchist" is demonstrably false. Foucault expressly repudiated the ideas that all power is evil and that a society without power is possible; he was repeatedly critical of that "State-phobia" which sees civil society as the natural repository of all virtue. He was, certainly, a libertarian; Merquior seems to be one of those, numerous among the Right as among the Left, for whom the word "anarchist" serves as a pejorative alternative to "libertarian". Merquior attacks Foucault for denying the differences between Soviet tyranny and Western freedom; Perry Anderson describes Foucault as a "transfuge to the right" who "vies today in Cold War zeal with Kolskowsky". One should not be astonished that Merquior thanks Anderson for influencing the "tenor" of his book: this testimony to a common animosity is perhaps the one meaningful tribute which he succeeds in paying Foucault.

Merquior complains of my failure to report that I am criticized in his book. It mentions me in only three brief passages. One of these is an apparently approving quotation. Another describes me as a "valiantly Marxifying Foucauldian", who perversely thinks that Foucault's conception of power was what he said it was. A third makes me say that "there is no need to describe [Foucault's] enterprise as a Nietzschean challenge to Marxism", a view which is not far from the opposite of mine. Irritating as this is, it pales into insignificance alongside Merquior's wholesale distortions of Foucault's thought. To suggest that I should have devoted space to it in a brief review is the merest coat-trailing.

COLIN GORDON,  
10 Earl Street, Oxford.

## Clare Editions

Sir, – In your issue of June 20 Tom Paulin concludes his review of Mark Storey's edition of John Clare's letters with the words: "Let us hope that before the century ends Clare's works will be circulating in cheap editions and the road to Helpston will be packed with astonished pilgrims."

A beginning has been made on both these counts. In 1984 a 500-page selection of Clare's verse and prose was made available in the Oxford Authors series for £4.95 (*TLS*, October 26, 1984), and this year Penguin issued *The Parish* at £2.50, both books edited by Eric Robinson and myself.

The road to Helpston will be taken on Saturday, July 12, by many Clare pilgrims for the fifth annual John Clare Society Festival and Mr Paulin is welcome. The Membership Secretary of the Society is George Dixon, 8 Priory Road, Peterborough.

DAVID POWELL,  
31 Bush Hill, Northampton.

The price of *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* by Norris J. Lacy is \$60, not \$38.95 as was stated in the publication details preceding T. A. Shippey's review of the book in the *TLS* of May 30.

## British Library Lending Services

Sir, – It was most kind of Mr Wilson to reply (Letters, June 20) to my protest against the proposal to lend out foreign books from the Reference Division. His assurance to visitors that they will "almost certainly" (italics mine) be able to refer to the books they request has a faintly Gilbertian flavour. What, never? Well, hardly ever.

The real point at issue, surely, is that on grounds of financial expediency (and what institution is never short of money?) a far-reaching policy decision has been made, on a vital matter of principle, which undermines the present status of a unique international institution. This policy was part of the Dainton Report (1969) and has been successfully resisted for nearly twenty years. Henceforward, however, the librarians of other learned institutions (also under financial constraint) will simply buy fewer and fewer foreign – and that includes American – books. The pressures, therefore, to lend out "lightly used foreign books" (Dainton, para 274) from the Reference Division will increase year by year. The new policy is thus the thin end of what is bound to become a very destructive wedge, which will ultimately threaten the integrity of the Reference Division collection of the British Library.

T. A. BIRRELL,  
English Studies, Erasmuslaan 40, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

## The Melbourne Manuscript

Sir, – There are no grounds for attributing to Webster, or to any pre-Restoration dramatist other than Shirley, the four pages of manuscript play-text which remained unsold at auction in London on June 20 (see Richard Proudfoot's article, "A Jacobean dramatic fragment", *Commentary*, June 13). We have no sample of Webster's handwriting, not even a signature, but we have several specimens of Shirley's, and these include authorial corrections and insertions in the manuscript of an early version of his play *The Court Secret*. One of these insertions is reproduced in Greg's *English Literary Autographs*, Pt III, No XCIV(d). All four pages of the Melbourne manuscript are reproduced in the auction catalogue, but in much less than half-size. The frontispiece, however, is an additional reproduction of the first page, in slightly more than half-size. If this is examined under magnification, and compared with Greg's XCIV(d), I believe anyone competent in handwriting of the period will agree that both documents were written by the same person, though probably not in the same year. At first glance the lower half of the first Melbourne page, from "Prince: Good good in faith", may seem to be in a different hand from what precedes, but this is not so. The writer broke off in the middle of the page for some reason, perhaps to mend his pen or prepare a new one, or even to ponder how to continue. He resumed in smaller and tighter writing, but comparison of words written in both halves of the page, for example, *Prince, Lorenzo, bee, And, with, not* and individual letters, especially majuscule A, B, C, D, I and J, show the same letter-forms throughout.

As well as handwriting, all other data point to Shirley as author of this Melbourne manuscript: It was used to wrap a packet of documents belonging to the elder Sir John Coke, Secretary of State from 1625 to February 1639/40, when he retired to Melbourne Hall, Derbyshire, a residence he had given to his heir, Sir John Coke the younger (cf Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Copper MSS at Melbourne Hall*, Vol II, pp 250–2). The elder Sir John Coke was already at Melbourne when the younger wrote from Leicester, on March 30, 1640, to inform his father that "Your two first loads of stuff are come safe", presumably to Leicester on their way to Melbourne (op cit, p 252). It is probable that Thomas Coke, younger son of the former Secretary of State, and a barrister at Gray's Inn, was supervising and assisting in the packing off to Melbourne of his father's effects, some of which, especially important documents, may have been deposited

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continued overleaf



## COMMENTARY

## Versions of history

## Julian Budden

GIACOMO PUCCINI  
Tosca  
RICHARD WAGNER  
Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg  
LUCIANO BERIO/ITALO CALVINO  
La vera storia  
Teatro Comunale, Florence

This year, a somewhat indifferent Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, nourished largely on a diet of recitals by celebrities playing standard repertoire, ended with a production of Puccini's *Tosca* (June 21) which threatened to create a scandal ("And before her the whole Maggio trembled" ran one pre-performance headline parodying the heroine's parting shot as she surveys the murdered body of Scarpia.) No sooner had Jonathan Miller's production gone into rehearsal than a senior member of the theatre's administrative board called a press conference in order to denounce the up-dating of the action to 1943 as a left-wing political manoeuvre designed to blacken the role of the Roman Catholic Church during the Second World War – not least by showing a devout Roman congregation giving thanks in a Te Deum for a reported German victory. Miller rebutted the charge mildly if somewhat irritably. Had he wished he could easily have carried the war into the enemy's territory; he could have pointed out that the Vatican has always regarded Communism rather than Fascism as its main adversary; that many Italians were grateful to Mussolini who through the Concordat of 1927 had made it possible to be a good Catholic and a good patriot for the first time since Italy's unification; that the racial laws of 1938 had been introduced without any noticeable protest from the Holy See; and that no matter in which epoch the action is set Mother Church does not come out of it very well.

In the event the occasion passed off peacefully enough, though there were one or two grumbles from the press. The truth is that neither religion nor politics meant much to Puccini. In the opera the political element of Sardou's play is reduced to a minimum, and what remains of it is rather ineptly handled. *Tosca* is about the loves and sufferings of individuals caught up in the pitiless machine of a war and the vicious intrigues of a Chief of

Police. In bringing the action to within living memory Miller's aim was to give it greater immediacy; and here for the most part he succeeded. A number of details unobtrusively reminded us of the date chosen – the telephone on Scarpia's table; the map on the rear wall, consulted during Cavaradossi's interrogation by a visiting official introduced with a formal handshake; the prison guard in Act Three reading a newspaper; though one could make the pedantic objection that at a time of general conscription Cavaradossi should have been in the army. While Stefano Lazaridis's tilted permanent set made for an impressive stage picture it sometimes inhibited the natural movements of the singers (Spoletta, for instance, was constantly sledding himself with the help of the table in Act Two). The one problem that for me remains unsolved is how to deal with the pantomime with the candles and the crucifix following Scarpia's murder. Tosca, with her devout upbringing, cannot bear to leave the scene of her crime without having performed the appropriate religious rites. In this production there were no candles and no crucifix; nor did she even cross herself. Instead she went to a filing desk, took out a drawer containing unspecified documents and emptied it over Scarpia's body – just at a time when she must be anxious to get away.

Eva Marton was a somewhat phlegmatic Tosca, apt to stand around with hand thrust into overcoat pockets, suggesting a plumper Dietrich. The voice is rich and full but the diction is frequently clouded. Giuseppe Giacomini as her lover deployed all the resources of his powerful, if occasionally tight, voice to moving effect; Silvano Caroli was wonderfully incisive as Scarpia. The septagenarian Italo Tujo (to Florence what Hugues Cuénod used to be to Glyndebourne) gave us his incomparable Scarsian. Zubin Mehta, who conducted, seems to have a special relationship with Italy no less than with Israel. The orchestra and chorus performed magnificently for him, evoking an appropriate response from the audience. He shaped the score with loving care and thought, even if it was possible to feel that his tempi were occasionally slow.

There was nothing controversial about the previous offering at the Teatro Comunale: *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in a conventional production by Michael Hämpe, with sets by John Gunter, a mainly German cast and Zubin Mehta conducting. Fifty years ago it would

have been *I Maestri Cantori di Norimberga* and sung in Italian by Italian singers. But for some time *Originalsprache* has been the rule in Italy, with casts frequently imported from the composer's country of origin. But *Die Meistersinger* is a long opera and to facilitate the audience's comprehension Mehta – who is also this year's director of the Maggio – decided to have "surtitles" in Italian projected on to a point just above the proscenium arch. This system of translation is to be introduced at the Royal Opera House for their production of *Jenifa* in November. In practice it worked quite well. It was easy to avoid looking at the words – indeed when the stage was fully illuminated, as in the second scene of Act Three they were often hard to see. But if anyone needed to remind himself of the content of some of the longer solos he could always do so by glancing upward. Outstanding among the performances were Bernd Weikl's golden-toned Sachs, Hermann Frey's Beckmesser and the David of Manfred Fink. Lucia Popp sang Eva with immaculate style but without the amplitude and warmth of tone that this role requires.

## AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 185

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than July 25. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers on that date, or failing that the most nearly correct – in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.

Entries, marked "Author, Author 285" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on August 1.

1 Apart from there being no fire, the room was terribly cheerless. The hard little sofa, the few and hard little arm-chairs were upholstered in a cretonne of so dim and dismal a pattern that it was hard to imagine anybody, even a B—, actually choosing it. To imagine them going into a shop, taking a seat, having cretonnes thrown over a screen and suddenly saying, "all excited, 'That's the very thing for me—stop!"

2 The house was perversely full of souvenirs of places even more ugly than itself and of things it would have been a pious duty to forget. The worst horror was the acres of varnish, something advertised and smelly, with which everything was smeared; it was F—'s conviction that the application

The opening opera of the festival was Luciano Berio's *La vera storia* (April 29), with text by Italo Calvino, a co-production with the opera houses of Chicago and Paris, conducted by the composer himself. (The title, incidentally, does not imply a re-interpretation of history but merely recalls the catch-phrase with which the old ballad singers began their recitals – "Hear the true story of Tristan", or whoever). The opera is divided into two parts. The first tells a not unfamiliar story involving a man condemned to death by firing squad, a mezzo-soprano who steals the child of the city governor who condemned him and a tenor in love with a soprano called Leonora. In the second part, music text and action are re-cast. The singers included Valeri Popova (Leonora), Livia Budai (Ada), Rodney Nolan (Luca) and Lajos Miller (Ivo). The most unforgettable performance was that of the popular singer Milva as the *cantastorie*, who delivered her *ballate* with an Ethel Merman-like punch. It is all wonderfully gripping theatre and it would be good to see *La vera storia* at Covent Garden.

of it, by their own hands and hilariously shoving each other, was the amusement of the B—s on rainy days.

3 That is how I came to grow up with all manner of terrible cut-glass mirrors with bevelled edges hanging from chains over tiled fireplaces, shaggy old white carpets fitted, zig-zag patterned rugs, nests of walnut tables, semicircular armchairs in pale creaking hide, standard lamps with polygonal ivory satin shades, white wrought-iron trellises over radiators . . . and pièce de résistance, a collection of china and glass birds, some rather large, which march along the shelves of highly polished pale wood bookcases with sliding doors made of yet more glass.

Competition No 281  
Winner: E. Gordon Allen

Answers:  
1 Then come, put the jorum about,  
And let us be merry and clever;  
Our hearts and our liquors are stout;  
Here's the Three Jolly Pigeons for ever.  
Oliver Goldsmith, *The Shopers to Conquer* I, 1.  
2 For let 'em be clumsy, or let 'em be slim.  
Young or ancient, I care not a feather:  
So fill a pint bumper quite up to the brim,  
And let us e'en toast them together.  
R. B. Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*, III, 11.  
3 Flout 'em, and scout 'em; and scout 'em and flout 'em  
Thought is free.  
Shakespeare, *The Tempest* III, 11.

## Andrew Young

Sir, – May I correct both Grevel Lindop (review of Andrew Young's *Poetical Works*, June 13) and Sir Rupert Hart-Davis (Letters, June 27)? The edition of Young's *Collected Poems* illustrated by Joan Hassall was first published in 1950 by Jonathan Cape. Hart-Davis's revised and enlarged *Collected Poems of Andrew Young*, also with Joan Hassall's engravings, appeared in 1960.

G. R. WOODWARD,  
3 Gilbert Court, Hanger Vale Lane, London W5.

## Ernest Bramah

Sir, – In his appreciation of Ernest Bramah's *Kai Lung's Golden Hours* (June 27) D. J. Enright suggests that the author may have dropped his original surname, Smith, "in the interests of the exotic", thereby possibly perpetuating the notion that "Bramah" is somehow connected with "Brahmin" (not that that is exactly appropriate for China). Surely he shortened his name simply to be distinctive, much as Anthony Hope Hawkins became Anthony Hope, and Nevil Shute Norway wrote as Nevil Shute. Anyway, Bramah is a good old English name and is simply a variant of "Bramali" ("nook where broom grows").

Incidentally, Bramah's first book as a failed farmer was not *English Farming and Why It Turned It Up* but *English Farming and Why It Turned It In*. Kai Lung would have appreciated the agricultural metaphor, and doubtless improved on it.

ADRIAN ROOM,  
173 The Causeway, Petersfield, Hampshire.

## A faintly fantastic forest

## Arnold Whittall

BENJAMIN BRITTEN  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream*  
Royal Opera House, Covent Garden

Even without knowing that Benjamin Britten first encountered Shakespeare's play as a fifteen-year-old playing Mendelssohn's music for a production at Gresham's, Holt, one might be tempted to see his opera as a translated school extravaganza, mounted by boys with some help from the staff (and staff wives). The gawky setting of the fairies' song "Over hill, over dale" that begins the work after its atmospheric orchestral prelude seems designed to evoke a world in which choirboys' surplises are ready to be donned at a moment's notice – the world of Britten's *Missa Brevis*, composed in 1959 a few months before work on this opera began.

The opera owes much of its magic to Britten's gift for making understatement genuinely affecting, and although his fairies are attractively unexpressed, they have some beautifully tender music, notably the lullaby that ends Act Two, "On the ground / Sleep sound", one of Britten's most moving inspirations. So it is one of the strengths of Christopher Renshaw's production (new to Covent Garden, but based on the same team's Aldeburgh Festival performances of 1980) that it has a stage-wise cast of children (from Trinity School, Croydon) who make a physically confident and vocally assured flock of fairies. As Head Boy and Headmaster, Puck and Oberon are nightmarish figures. Puck doesn't sing, and in the athletic, stridently declaimed performance of Mark Ryland, wouldn't know a surplice if he saw one: while Oberon, for whom James Bowman's immaculate counter-tenor can modulate from honey to venom with insidious smoothness, is dangerously impulsive and imperious. There is a risk of Titania seeming irrelevant to this male fantasy world, and the glittering coloratura and smooth rhythms of Britten's music for the Fairy Queen do rather place her under glass. Yet Lillian Watson, avoiding shrillness at the expense of some verbal clarity, is a positive presence, helped, like all the fairies, by the

multicoloured costumes of Robin Don.

The hempen homespun are treated straightforwardly: indeed, there is too little fantasy in Bottom's ass's head, which leaves his features in plain view.

The play score is well staged, allowing the audience to savour verbal as well as visual jokes. If we don't hear all the comments on the play of the three pairs of lovers, little harm is done, if only because by this stage the four-some whose adventures in the wood have occupied so much time have rather outstayed their welcome. The accomplished quartet of Felicity Lott, Clare Powell, Kim Begley and Jonathan Summers are rightly concerned not to match their physical agility with vocal forthrightness – this is Britten, not Puccini. Yet had the conductor Roderick Brydon encouraged a slightly stronger flow to the lovers' music, its true immediacy and eloquence might have been more evident. The producer is right in allowing us not to take the quartet very seriously. But if the tenderness and anger are a shade artificial, the immaturity is genuine, and it takes more than an appealing, incongruous teddy bear for Hermia to project that quality. This quartet seems to be suppressing self-assurance rather than expressing innocence.

In general Roderick Brydon's grasp of the music's subtly varied movement is impeccable, and the orchestra plays well for him. Movement is also basic to the stage presentation, and here it is most remote from any school production. There is the frequent movement from rear to forestage of the set's principal structure, a raised platform, enclosed by a triangular climbing frame: this is the domain of the fairies, but it also serves as dais for Theseus and Hippolyta in the final scene. There is also movement laterally across the stage of objects suggesting clouds or bushes, and of two sets of drapes which are the nearest the set comes to depicting the heavy, hanging foliage of a forest. As a stage picture it is a little short on mystery, but it works well in a purely functional way and served the magical artificiality of the drama efficiently. On this occasion, at least, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does not seem a chamber opera lost in the grand spaces of the Royal Opera House.

## Nothing if not personal

## Blake Morrison

Phillip Larkin: His life and work  
Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull,  
until July 12

The saddest item in this rapidly assembled but superbly organized exhibition at his old university library are the letters Larkin wrote last autumn, tired, grim, putting a brave face on the unfaceable: "My doctors assure me that I shall be a new man in a few months time. Personally I liked the old one, but he seems to have gone for ever." Yet the memorabilia "chronically on show . . . in locked cases" aren't, overall, dispiriting. What will survive of Larkin, perhaps, is laughter.

It is the unpublished poems, naturally, that take the eye. The first of these dates from his schooldays, a cod exam paper asking "What is the point of poetry?", and showing, as he says, "what a cancelled little swine I was". Other spoof items are a parody of his own "Days" – "What is booze for? / Booze is what we drink . . . / What can we drink but booze?" – and a postcard from Sark complaining "The water's upset my digestion. / This must be like living abroad." But there are also two substantial pieces, an unfinished poem about dancing, or not dancing, and a leering, envious verse-letter to a friend on the difference between the recipient's sexual success "in train, tutorial and telephone booth" and his own less fortunate experiences with girls who "put off men / By being unattractive, or too shy. / Or having morals."

The bachelor persona appears more aly in the pencil drafts for the conclusion of "The Whitson Weddings", which toy with a less affirmative presentation of the newly married couples than finally emerged: "Some meant what they had promised but would lapse" is

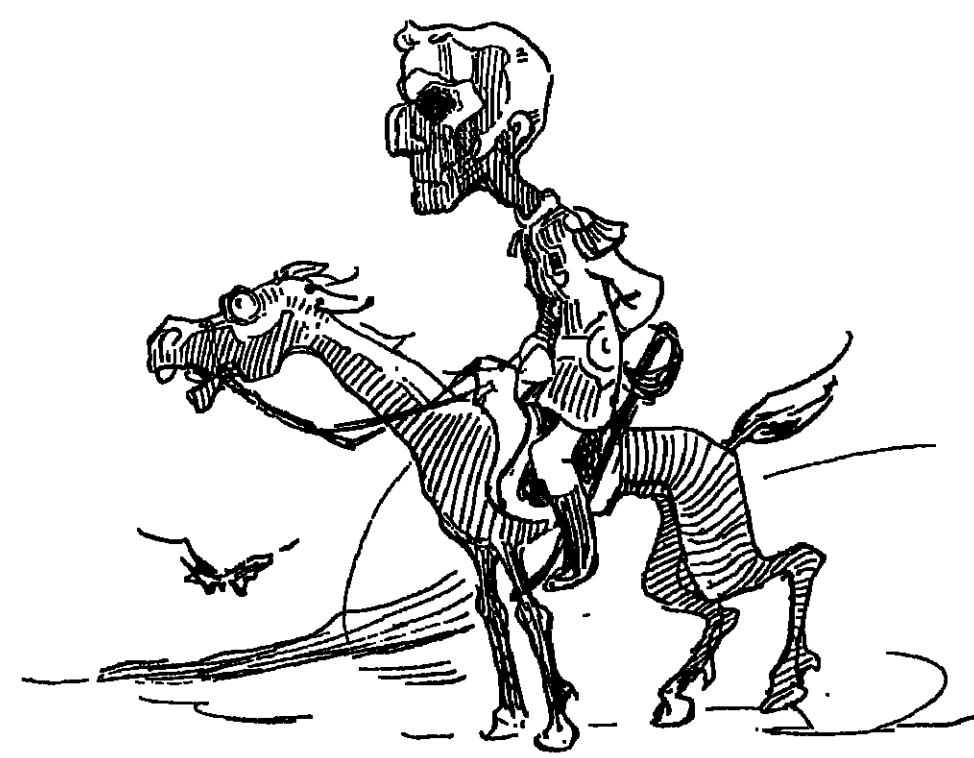
one cancelled line, and another speaks of "short, appalling futures". Slighter textual amendments appear in the display of an at times hilarious correspondence with George Hartley of the Marvell Press about *The Less Deceived*. Larkin first objects to the idea of having his book come out with a nearby Hull publisher "since my poems are nothing if not personal", then, having secured "a promise that there shall be no local-association sales" he decides on the title *The Less Deceived* because it will "give a suitable impression of sad-eyed (and clear-eyed) realism" and of "my fundamentally passive attitude to poetry (and to life . . .)". There are also some proto-Bleaneyish grumbles about lodgings:

The old trouble – radio – is still very much with me. I should like to build a public convenience for camels over the grave of Signor Marconi . . . However, cotton wool from an aspirin bottle (stuffed in the ear) helps a bit. Not much. But a bit. And I am free from loutish research students playing passage-soccer with a rubber bulb from a motor horn.

The seriousness with which Larkin took his responsibilities as a librarian is visible here in notebooks, photographs of the public smiling (or more usually chortling) man, letters to architects about air conditioning and floor loadings ("Have Ove Arup built a library to this specification before? Did it fall down?"), and a speech honouring the founder of the library, Brynmor Jones: "I feel like the station master of St Pancras called upon to make a presentation to St Pancras himself."

Among the more bizarre items – a toad office paper weight, a Japanese translation of "Church Going" – the least expected are his drawings, which reveal a talent for comic, Stevie Smith-like doodles. His self-portrait is of a bow-tied, almost supercilious dandy, and if this seems too radical and unsettling a notion yet, this fine exhibition marks the beginning of a process which will bury the legend of the grim clerk.

## COMMENTARY



"The Duke of Wellington", one of the G. K. Chesterton's illustrations for the first published book of clerihews, *Biography for Beginners* by E. Clerihew Bentley (1905); the original pen-and-ink drawing is one of many by him in the exhibition G. K. Chesterton 1874–1936. Writer and Artist now at the National Theatre until August 2. Also to be seen there are first editions of books and pamphlets by Chesterton, articles by him in periodicals and newspapers, books about him, manuscripts and letters, photographs, portraits and caricatures of G. K. C., and biographical documents ranging from his St Paul's School reports to James Agate's review of his posthumous autobiography (1936). Michael Finck's new biography, G. K. Chesterton (369pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £16. 0 29778858) will be reviewed in a later issue of the TLS.

## The challenge of the common man

## Peter Kemp

A Celebration of G. K. Chesterton  
G. K. Chesterton: The Man Who Was Thursday  
Radio 4

G. K. Chesterton used paradox to exorcize perversity. Driven to the end of his tether by *fin de siècle* morbidities, he strove to endow optimism and the ordinary with exoticism. This was brought out by Radio 4's two contributions marking the fiftieth anniversary of his death: *A Celebration of G. K. Chesterton* – a sonic collage of remarks by and about the author assembled by Michael Finck – and a four-part dramatization of *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

The first programme laid perceptive emphasis on Chesterton's time, in the 1890s, as a student at the Slade. There, he was plagued by his associates' fashionably vitiated views and tormented by "hideous" imaginings of his own. Like the crusading Don John of Austria in his poem "Lepanto" or King Alfred in his *Ballad of the White Horse*, he roused himself to rout such "horrible and heathen" things energetically. Always attracted by the notion of the clean chivalric struggle, given to perambulating London swathed in a cloak and brandishing a sword-stick, he deployed in his writings rapier-like thrusts of epigram to keep at bay what he saw as the sinister encroachments of pessimism and nihilism. Sallies from unexpected angles defend the stance of decency; common sense is driven home with uncommon ingenuity. Spurning the 1890s adulation of the aberrant and extreme, Chesterton championed the traditional and usual. But, as Radio 4's programmes kept reminding you, though he embraced the values of the Georgians, he invested them with all the unconventionality of the Decadents.

Christianity and the common man were his watchwords. His attitude to the former was robustly idiosyncratic. "Gilbert was not an ascetic in the ordinary sense", Maistre Ward asserted of this twenty-stone, toping *bon vivant*. But he wasn't an ascetic in any sense. In religion, as in everything else, Chesterton remained a romantic. Extracts from his lives of St Francis of Assisi and St Thomas Aquinas, quoted in Michael Finck's anthology, made this abundantly clear. The first focused on the valorous combating of fear; the second roister-

ingly applauded the heady delights of intellectual acrobatics. Together, they show what made Chesterton such a winning apologist for Catholicism. Setting the mind whirling exhilaratingly through paradoxes and head-over-heels aphorisms, portraying the moral life as a thrilling stand against Satan ("the smell of spiritual evil" wafts as intoxicatingly through his pages as through any 1890s work), he turned religion into something offering all the giddy pleasures of an afternoon at the fun-fair followed by a stirring evening at the melodrama. Likewise, drained of cliché and infused with Chesterton's sparkling lucidity, everyday life becomes a gleaming welter of vitality: "Is ditch-water dull?" he characteristically asked in one of his last radio broadcasts. "Naturalists with microscopes have told me that it teems with quiet fun."

Glyn Dearman's production of *The Man Who Was Thursday* – adapted by Peter Buckman – splendidly conveys this. From the opening barrel-organ music – to which, Chesterton's book affirms, ordinary folk in the street daily "marched into battle" in defence of sanity and soundness – the dramatization scarcely strikes a false note. The story's onslaughts on anarchy and its idiocies – making it often seem like a rumbustious rewrite of Conrad's *The Secret Agent* – are exuberantly maintained. Its bouncy, trampolining-like turnings-over of expectations and revellings in the topsy-turvy keep all their verve in this version. In particular, the cast pounce gleefully on opportunities offered by the plot's helter-skelter volte-faces: Shaun Prendergast's Gogol vocally nipping from brooding Slav to chirpy Cockney when stripped of his whiskers, Edward de Souza's St Eustache shedding his Gallic accent with his false nose and Ronald Herdman's hilariously macabre Professor de Worms modulating between piping Germanic pedantry and mellow thespian tones.

The play presents the story as the hero's small-hours account to his wife of a nightmare from which he has just awakened. During his nocturnal narrating – seeming as much the man who was thirsty as the man who was Thursday – he quaffs several bottles of Burgundy. Dilucous carousals feature prominently, too, in the tale he has to tell. All this cheery cork-popping gave a suitably convivial note to this anniversary tribute to a talent as genial as it was spirited.

## Letters

with Thomas at Gray's Inn. The auction catalogue's account of the Melbourne manuscript concludes with a conjecture, under "Provenance", which needs correction. Citing a letter of August 1634, to Secretary of State Coke, which reports that "the books of Sir John Coke that were at Gray's Inn" have been sent to Melbourne (op cit, Vol II, p 61), it assumes that these belonged to Sir John Coke the elder, and that the Melbourne manuscript may have been used to wrap documents sent at the same time. The assumption is clearly wrong, as the letter's next sentence shows: "The law books Mr. Thomas keeps for his own use." The books sent to Melbourne (books, not packets of documents) from Gray's Inn in 1634 were those the younger Sir John Coke had kept there. He was a member of Gray's Inn from October 1627 until he gave up residence after his marriage in July 1633. His brother Thomas has been admitted to Gray's Inn in April 1630, and was called to the Bar there in May 1636. Thomas, in a letter which incidentally shows that the younger Sir John left Gray's Inn before October 1633 (op cit, Vol II, p 34), describes at length preparations for revels projected by the Inns of Court, writing with such enthusiasm as to suggest he may have been one of the friends Shirley is known to have had at Gray's Inn even before he was admitted a member in January 1633/4. When Thomas wrote it was not known which "poet" was to compose the text of the projected masque. The writer chosen was James Shirley. His *Triumph of Peace* was presented by members of the four Inns of Court on February 3, 1633/4, in the Whitehall Banqueting House, and repeated at Merchant Taylors' Hall ten days later. Shirley's admission to an

Inn of Court a fortnight before the masque's first performance was probably prompted by approval of his work on *The Triumph of Peace*, but that the admission was to Gray's Inn rather than any other doubtless reflects the friendship that already existed between him and some members of this Inn. We should therefore not be surprised to find that a sheet of manuscript from an early draft of Shirley's *The Traitor* was in 1640 lying discarded in Gray's Inn, and used for wrapping up a packet of documents.

It should have been obvious to anyone studying the Melbourne manuscript that it is a rejected early version of the second scene of Shirley's *The Traitor*. The principal characters, Alexander, Duke of Florence ("Prince" in the manuscript's speech-prefixes), and Lorenzo, are in exactly the same situation, with the same designations, as in the corresponding scene in *The Traitor* as published in 1635. The exile whose letter causes the crisis is "Castruccio" in both versions, and there are other close parallels, which even the catalogue noticed. Significant of Shirley's maturer judgment is that in the published text, the Prince no longer indulges in the bombast popular in many plays of the period; and that Lorenzo no longer defends himself with cheaply humorous repartee.

The auction catalogue's dissertation shows that understanding of the manuscript's content was prevented by a complex of preconceptions. Readiness to accept, as reliable, "conclusions" based only on stylistic "evidence" by "literary critics" (academic or other) has betrayed generations of undergraduates, and also some seniors. It has done this here, as the pages devoted to Webster's "characteristics" and Shirley's "punchant" for reworking other

men's plays" demonstrate. Unsupported generalizations present other booby-traps for the credulous and are found in the most unlikely places. G. E. Bentley, normally severely critical and cautious as historian of the pre-Restoration theatre, nevertheless "cannot believe . . . that differences between [a MS version of *The Court Secret* and the 1653 printed text] are accounted for by revision . . . A professional Caroline dramatist who had written thirty to forty plays . . . would not need to rewrite the majority of his lines, as in this scene" (*The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, Vol V, p 1102). Is there any evidence to support this generalization? I know of none. Shirley may have wished to revise, even if there was no "need", and what little we can infer about his compositional practices suggests that he was much given to revision. Most of this evidence is recorded by Bentley. Every six months Shirley brought a new play to the theatrical company for which he was writing (Bentley, op cit, Vol V, pp 1068, 1070). This allowed ample time to reconsider and rewrite, if he wished to do so. Shirley is believed to have made alterations to texts of his plays even while they were going through the press; see Bentley on *The Changes* (op cit, p 1094); on *The Constant Maid* (p 1095); on *Contention for Honour and Riches* (p 1077); on *The Court Secret* (p 1101); on *The Whist Fair One* (p 1167); and, on Shirley's revisions of his poems, see Ray L. Armstrong's *Poems of James Shirley* (New York, 1941, pp xxvii–xxviii). Shirley may have been less of a hack and a more careful poet than has been commonly supposed.

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## The word that failed

Geoffrey Sampson

ANDREW LARGE  
The Artificial Language Movement  
239pp. Blackwell/Deutsch. £19.50.  
£19.50  
0631 144978

Ariadna, Adamitik, Orba, Panskrit; Ao, Eo, Esk, Ile, Is, Tal; Perfekt, Simplo, Viva, Unita, Expreso, Hom-idoymo, Geoglot; Carphophorophilus, Astegoniographianek, La Langue Bleue . . . The number of artificial languages that have been devised is staggering, running into hundreds, apart from the one that everybody has heard of, Ludwig Zamenhof's Esperanto. In the seventeenth century philosophers created languages based on logical taxonomies of concepts, which they saw as having an important role to play in the advance of scientific thought: in one such language, *ä* meant "animal", *ab* "mammal", *äbo* "carnivore", *äboj* "feline", *äboje* "cat". In the nineteenth century the emphasis shifted to naturalism: artificial languages were devised by pruning away the irregularities of ordinary languages while retaining existing vocabulary.

## Sexual shortcomings

Charles Sleeth

DENNIS BARON  
Grammar and Gender  
249pp. Yale University Press. £19.95.  
0300 035268

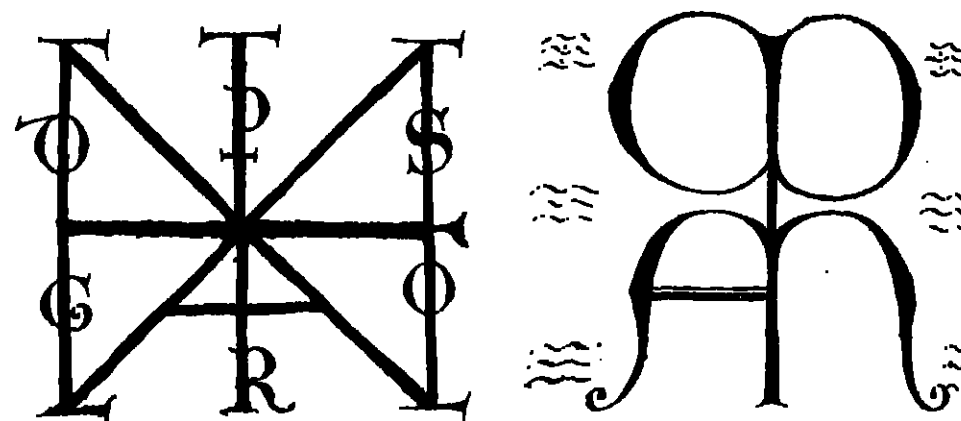
This book deals with linguistic (not only grammatical) points of controversy originated or given increased prominence by the feminist movement, mainly in its current phase but also in earlier phases. Apart from specific items like the asymmetry and injustice of allowing men to conceal their marital status under *Mr* and requiring women to reveal theirs by *Mrs* or *Miss* (until *Ms* was devised), the matters discussed include, but are not limited to, the following: the widely held view that the language of women derives from and is inferior to that of men; the contrary view that women are linguistically conservative and thus perform the service of guarding a language against corruption; the notion that the masculine gender, like the male sex, is superior to the feminine, and the traditional use, sometimes linked with this notion, of masculine words like *man* and *he* to

Andrew Large takes us through the history of the movement, with a long chapter on Esperanto as the only artificial language that came close to taking off as a serious rival or auxiliary to ordinary natural languages. Much of his factual material is derivative; for the early, philosophical languages he relies very heavily on James Knowlson's excellent *Universal Language Schemes in England and France* (1975). Where Large does go beyond the standard sources he sometimes makes mistakes: for instance it is not true that the EEC machine-translation project Eurotra intends to use Esperanto as an "interlanguage". But I know no previous detailed examination of the Esperanto movement written, as Large writes, from a sceptical outsider's point of view. His conclusion, surely correct, is that neither Esperanto nor its rivals can hope to succeed, since the fate of a language depends very little on its internal properties and almost wholly on the social standing of its users. I have no doubt that it would be perfectly practical, if the will were there, as well as a massive saving of taxpayers' money, for the EEC to adopt Esperanto for all official purposes instead of maintaining an army of translators to put everything into nine different natural languages. I am equally sure that the political will never will be

refer generically to human beings of both sexes; the complicated pros and cons of terms that specify gender (*authoress*, *male nurse*, *hostess*, *widower*) and those that do not (*attorney*, *spouse*, *flight attendant*); and the extreme and long-recognized inconvenience (not really a feminist issue at all) of having in English no common-gender pronoun of the third person singular.

The book's subject makes it a difficult one to review, since a reader's responses are constantly being triggered by the feminist and anti-feminist assertions and vocabulary choices to which Dennis Baron refers rather than by his work itself. Indeed, the fact that readers' awareness of their own opinions (including their own prejudices) is thus sharpened constitutes one of the positive values of the book, at least for readers who pause and reflect after the first few emotional explosions.

Yet apart from this kind of local interest *Grammar and Gender* makes a somewhat plodding impression. Baron too rarely says anything as arresting as his criticism of Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* for characterizing *woman* in terms of both good and bad qualities while characterizing *man* "only in the positive terms of courage, strength, and vigor, even though a saying like



Monograms from a charter of the Emperor Henry III, 1102, reproduced from Lettering as Drawing by Nicolas Gray (1939pp. Oxford University Press. 0 191214379).

there to award this role to a language which is seen as a crankish hobby.

Since Large appreciates the relevance of social considerations in a way that most people interested in artificial languages do not, it is a pity that he has not gone a little deeper into this aspect. He mentions the handful of Esperanto native speakers, offspring of enthusiastic Esperantist couples; one would like to know

what it is like to have an artificial language as one's mother tongue, and I wish Large had interviewed one or two of these people. Again, he leaves us unsure how capable Esperanto is of coping with the small change of social life as well as the "serious" topics – undoubtedly it could be used for a customs declaration, but could a truck-driver use it to talk his way past border-post with dodgy paperwork?

*Isn't that just like a man?* readily admits a negative interpretation, imputing to *man* such traits as selfishness, brutishness, stubbornness, and insensitivity". His lists tend to be unilluminating catalogues. This is especially disturbing with those in his chapter on etymology, which discriminate hardly at all between derivations proposed before and after the development of comparative-historical linguistics.

Baron's treatment of etymology is rather shaky in some other respects as well. He lists *care* incorrectly among the cognates of *where*, and he considers it laudable in some etymologists to trace *wife* back no farther than a Germanic word meaning "female human being" and reprehensible in other etymologists to seek a remoter (admittedly less certain) connection with an Indo-European root that means "winding" or "turning". Such a value judgment is out of place. In linguistic prehistory as in every other discipline it is a scholar's duty to try to push the boundaries of knowledge forward even by conjecture, and it is not impossible that Indo-European linguistic usages may have sometimes reflected a belief in male superiority.

One slight recurring annoyance is that Baron's treatment of the topics he discusses is rambling and fuzzily organized. This is under-

standable, because they are so heterogeneous that they can hardly be treated systematically, but a reader should be warned that the excellent section on the problems surrounding *woman* and its near-synonyms (*lady*, *girl*, *female*) constitutes approximately the last half of the chapter "Marked men".

In 1981 Baron published in *American Speech* an article, "The Epicene Pronoun", which was a historical and critical account of attempts to remedy the lack of a common-gender third person singular pronoun in English. His penultimate chapter, "The Word that Failed", repeats much of the substance of this article, with updating, in leaner and more pointed form, and is one of the best parts of the book. In it he points out that it is nearly impossible to impose neologisms by fiat on a language community (something that many non-linguists cannot get through their heads) and very sensibly comes close to concluding that the English language community has already solved this problem (if pedants would permit) by developing the "singular they" (*If anyone telephones, ask them to leave a message*), which the *OED* records as early as the fifteenth century and in such reputable writers as Sir Thomas More, Shakespeare, Richardson, Fielding, Chesterfield, Goldsmith and Ruskin.

K. Jerne noted in his 1984 Nobel address, the immune system possesses chemical and cellular kinetic properties which are beginning to look very much like those of a generative grammar; in other words, the adaptability of this system is such as to allow for a colossal recombinatorial diversity and therefore for a correspondingly rich significative content. Immunosemantics, the semiotics of cellular communication in the immune system, is only one among several convergent specialisms which have made great progress in the last few years and which need to be taken note of in future handbooks such as Nöth's.

A careful and wise distinction between verbal and vocal communication is drawn. Plainly, not all verbal signs are sounded (they are silent, for instance, in the sign languages of the deaf); and not all vocal signs are verbal (compare Roman Jakobson's configurational features and expressive features, both of which are supplementary to the distinctive features of normal spoken discourse). This subsection leads Nöth to a consideration of the mutual relationships of semiotics and linguistics, which can be twofold: their association is either coordinate or it is hierarchical; and, if the latter, semiotics either becomes a branch of linguistics or vice versa. All three of these positions have been variously advanced and embraced from time to time, but, at least since Locke, all leading philosophers who have

thought about the issue at all, and, since Saussure, all leading linguists as well as others, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, have supported the view that linguistics is a subfield of semiotics. Nöth himself is of this persuasion. However, the far-reaching consequences of this taxonomical position, only hinted at by Peirce, remain to be worked out in detail, although a few efforts to this end have been attempted (most recently in Michael Shapiro's).

The concept of "nonverbal communication" is a blanket which covers a multitude of semiotic sins. Nöth's treatment of it could hardly be bettered. On the other hand, his section on aesthetics and visual communication is not nearly exhaustive enough – one thinks, to pick examples at random, of Japanese and the "language" of clothes (*à la* Allison Lurie, perhaps), or of flowers (in the manner of Kate Greenaway), among a host of other untreated topics. In the final chapter, on text semiotics in the broad sense, I missed discussions of the musical theatre and of the opera, surely among the most complex of genres, yet concerning the semiotic aspect of which there is now an accumulation of suggestive literature.

The manual is handsomely produced and presented, and almost free of misprints. Because of its high quality, all-round usefulness, and, for the moment, uniqueness, an English version should be published quickly.

## New Angles on the Saxon Shore

David Dumville

J. N. L. MYRES  
The English Settlements  
248pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £15.  
0 198217196

Exactly fifty years ago the Clarendon Press published Volume One of its Oxford History of England, a book which justly became famous as "Collingwood and Myres". In 1937 *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* by R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres enjoyed a second edition, which (in a succession of impressions) remained in print until last year. A model of clarity and elegant style, that volume has served most handsomely as a pleasurable and informative introduction to British history of the first half-millennium AD. In a relatively fast-moving subject, any book published half a century ago is inevitably vulnerable to the criticism of obsolescence. That it was not revised after the Second World War was no doubt due to the early death of R. G. Collingwood, the wayward genius who brilliantly but self-destructively combined the roles of professional philosopher and amateur archaeologist-historian. But it remains inscrutable why the Clarendon Press Delegates should have felt (apparently in the 1960s) that, alone of the fifteen volumes of the Oxford History, Volume One needed replacement: other candidates spring far more readily to mind. The 1980s have now seen publication of two volumes designed to substitute for the constituent parts of "Collingwood and Myres" – Peter Salway's *Roman Britain* (1981) and the book under review. Yet, within the next year or two, we shall have the first volumes of the New Oxford History of England; these will begin to cover the same ground. Only the Press's announcement that Myres's *The English Settlements* is the last of its series spares us from imagining that new volumes of the old series would be published alongside the New Oxford History.

"Collingwood and Myres" was not a work of intellectual collaboration, as Collingwood in 1936 and Myres in 1986 have been at pains to point out. In his new introduction Dr Myres directs some waspish remarks towards Collingwood, Stenton and Salway, his fellow-authors in the Oxford History, which will be of great interest to any future historian who exposes to public gaze the story of that great series in the way that Peter Linehan has done for the Cambridge Medieval History. Myres's 150 pages in 1936 have become 280 (with their own boards and dust-jacket) in 1986. As he tartly observes, none of his three colleagues has been able to restrain himself from giving an account of the British fifth century. Under these circumstances, is the provision of a separate volume, which overlaps both 1A and 2, justified? Accepting Myres's affirmative reply to that very question, what shall we make of his achievement?

Scholarly writing of the beginnings of English history excessively often cast their remarks about this dark age in terms of the continuity or discontinuity of population and institutions between the Romano-Celtic past and the Anglo-Saxon future. The resulting interpretations enjoy the value of predictability and often lack originality. In 1936 Myres provided a moderate exposition of the discontinuity hypothesis. The "shattered remnants" of the native population of what was now becoming England contributed very little, except perhaps in the persons of a few craftsmen and rather more slaves, to the building of the new order. In more recent years "continuity" has become the fashionable answer to the question. It is in this light that we should perhaps view the new volume's blurb which tells us that the author "now draws attention to some little-understood factors which seem to link Roman Britain with Anglo-Saxon England, and so suggests strands of political and social continuity". The reader will in fact have to work rather hard to identify these strands; only the more radical devotees of continuity will be able to weave from them a magic carpet to carry them unscathed from the fourth century to the seventh. To do that one has to start from the position defined by a recent TLS reviewer: "Someone has yet to explain convincingly how several thousand Anglo-Saxons set about displacing, if not exterminating, several

million Romano-Britons."

Someone has yet to explain where these amazing figures come from. It is doubtful if Myres will have any of that: for this reader he remains a moderate sceptic about continuity. But where he does take the long view is in his assessment of when substantial numbers of Germani first arrived in Britain (the fourth, or even the third, century), stressing therefore the long period during which Germanic soldiers lived (and were born?) in Britain alongside the provincials. This is a controversial position but none the less the logical development of Myres's post-war thinking. The Saxon Shore was so called because it was settled and "defended" by them. Questions are raised by this, but scarcely answered, as to the relationships between the Saxons settled on the Shore and the Angles who replaced (or displaced?) them in what became the Anglian areas of England. In short, how do we get the Saxons off part of their "Shore" and the Angles on?

It used to be a prime task of early Anglo-Saxon archaeologists to explain how the racial geography of seventh-century Britain was brought about in the preceding two centuries. The theories advanced by E. T. Leeds, who brought Saxons via the Wash and East Anglia ultimately to the Middle and Upper Thames Valley, seemed to many to explain archaeological distribution-patterns of metalwork and pottery. Such clarity is a casualty – perhaps rightly, perhaps not – of Myres's reconsideration.

## The critics' saga

Heather O'Donoghue

CAROL J. CLOVER and JOHN LINDOW (Editors)  
Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A critical guide  
387pp. Cornell University Press. \$32.95.  
0 8014 17354

According to its editors' preface, this book aims to be "a serviceable guide to the major categories of Old Norse-Icelandic literature for students and colleagues in adjacent fields". But it is not so much a guide to the literature, as a review of recent scholarship on the subject. As such, it is an extremely useful reference book, although its idiosyncrasies make it more suitable for scholars and students already familiar with the field to some extent; the critical essays which introduce the six bibliographies are uneven but stimulating and each has its own peculiar interest. But it is for the excellent bibliographies themselves that the book is most valuable. There are some gaps, which are in fact modestly acknowledged in the preface: there is no detailed reference to *Snorlunga saga*, for example. But the six chapters, on mythology and mythography, Eddic poetry, Skaldic poetry, Kings' sagas, family sagas and Norse romance – cover the field quite satisfactorily, and there is surprisingly little overlap.

The six critical essays differ greatly in scope and approach. John Lindow assesses nineteenth-century attitudes towards Germanic mythology and its scholars' misguided attempts to infer religion from mythology; he also reviews more recent work. He is especially illuminating on the theoretical issues faced by mythographers, both medieval and modern, and clearly outlines the major scholarly positions: Dumézil's structuralist analysis of Germanic myth; its corollary, the "historicist" approach; and the myth-ritual hypothesis, which sees mythological texts as having a religious function.

Joseph Harris, writing on Eddic poetry, concentrates his essay on "the directions of research . . . most encouraging for future progress". He is much more opinionated than Lindow, or indeed any of the other contributors, but his assessments are witty and, though controversial, very shrewd. While acknowledging what he calls the "nerve-wracking archaism" of L. M. Hollander's notorious Eddic translations, Harris yet praises Hollander's independence as a scholar. W. H. Auden's translations he rightly dismisses as "not especially distinguished". Harris's long, well-ordered bibliography is excellent.

One regrets the absence of a statement explaining the demise of such a convenient mapping of the settlement of East Anglia and the South Midlands.

Other parts of this book will also strike specialists as controversial. The self-styled "middle-aged revolutionaries" of toponymic studies will get more white hairs from reading Myres on Anglo-Saxon place-names. Scholars who reject the use of medieval legendary narratives in the writing of fifth and sixth-century history will find no justification of Myres's cheerful ignoring of the normal canons of historical criticism. And everyone will be startled to find him adhering to the extraordinary views on British Pelagianism which he published in 1960.

The difficulties of returning to give a new "standard" account, fifty years after a first and very successful attempt, are not to be underrated. This book has visibly had a long period of gestation. Parts are avowedly retained from the 1936 version: in the case of Chapter Seven ("The Humberes and the North") the decision was undoubtedly right. Dr Myres has made a brave and characteristically interesting attempt at a new history of the English settlements: to have published such a book one month after one's eighty-third birthday is something few of us will be capable of doing. Let us salute OUP's longest-standing author with appropriate congratulations on the achievement of this interpretation of a remarkable lifetime's work.

Roberta Frank in her essay on Skaldic poetry stresses the wide range of scholarly work on the subject. She displays, however, a certain flippancy relish for some of the odder corners of Skaldic research, and she describes scholarly controversy rather demeaningly in terms of "spats", "flyttings" and "feudings". Her concluding comparison between academic research and entomological "stimergy" (apparently an impulse on the part of termites to form work gangs) is characteristic.

Inevitably, of course, overviews of scholarship will reflect the interests and concerns of the reviewer. This is a problem to some extent with Frank's essay, and to a greater degree with Carol Clover's on the family sagas. Frank's essay, for instance, twice discusses the rite of blood-eagling, which she defines as a fictional motif which has arisen through the misunderstanding of imagery in Skaldic verse. But the authenticity of blood-eagling is still a matter of scholarly debate, and one in which Frank is herself currently engaged. Her repeated reference to it here looks like ratification of her own position.

Clover limits her piece on the family sagas to developments since 1964 – a wise decision given the amount of critical attention the family sagas have received. She therefore discusses more modern critical approaches, including feminist, formalist and structuralist work. She explains at some length a born-again "free prose" school of saga criticism (the so-called "free prose" theorists believed the family sagas to be derived from oral narrative), which views saga literature in terms of linguistic transformation, with an oral deep structure and a surface structure represented by written narrative. But here Clover is making a case rather than reviewing the work of others: belief that sagas are traditional at a generative level, and individual on the performative level, is fundamental to her own most recent book on sagas.

Theodore M. Andersson notes how little work has been done on ideological and stylistic qualities of the Kings' sagas, and devotes much of his essay to a detailed assessment of work done on textual relationships. Marianne Kalinke's piece on the *Riddarasögur* (sagas of chivalric romance) presents a straightforward description of the genre, and considers problems of definition and editorial work. Kalinke makes a compelling case for the study of this relatively neglected branch of Old Norse literature; the other essays, too, stimulate the reader to read the primary texts – if only to escape critics' views on other critics' views on literature.

## Settler stock

Michael Havinden

J. H. BETTEY  
Wessex from AD 1000  
320pp. Longman. £19.95 (paperback, £10.95).  
0 582 49207 6

To those who know Wessex, it will no doubt seem fitting that it should be the subject of the first modern volume to appear in Longman's new and ambitious Regional History of England. The series divides England into ten regions, each subdivided at the year 1000, so that eventually there will be two histories of each region. J. H. Bettey did not have the advantage of being able to build on Barry Cunliffe's *Wessex to AD 1000*, which has not yet appeared; but this is not serious, since his strength lies in his knowledge of Wessex in the early modern period (roughly 1500 to 1815).

Of the many problems associated with writing regional history, not the least difficult is the definition of the region itself. The general editors have defined Wessex as consisting of the historic counties of Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire, Bristol, Hampshire and Berkshire, which is acceptable – even though these counties no longer exist in their original form, so that the new county of Avon has had to be added. The aim of the series is to provide a clear and up-to-date synthesis of the vast amount of research into local and regional history during the past forty years; and to do it in a way which will appeal to the general reader as well as to the specialist. Bettey's long experience as an extra-mural teacher has enabled him to strike a good balance: the book is readable as well as learned.

If the chosen counties do somehow constitute a region with a shared history, geographical similarities may partly explain their unity, especially the great expanse of chalk downland which spreads from Dorset through Wiltshire into Berkshire and Hampshire; even if dissimilar landscapes like Somerset or the Thames valley between Oxford and Reading are also parts of Wessex. Membership of the old Saxon Kingdom, with its important centres at Winchester, Salisbury, Dorchester, Somerton and Wantage, and its associations with King Alfred, also helps, though more important perhaps is a shared descent from the original West Saxon settlers, culminating in a basically similar social and agrarian system and dialect.

Until about 1750, the favourable geographical position enjoyed by Wessex, between London and France, and with fertile soils and a genial climate, meant that it was a leading region both agriculturally and industrially (though this was subject to fluctuations, most notably during the depression of the late Middle Ages). After 1750, the balance locally tilted more towards agriculture and services and less towards industry. The great handicraft woollen industry centred on east Somerset and north-west Wiltshire declined rapidly; indeed it is possible that the whole of Wessex suffered from actual as well as relative de-industrialization from about 1800 onwards. During most of the nineteenth century agriculture continued to be prosperous and progressive, supported by the trades and services of the great ports like Bristol, Southampton and Portsmouth; and increasingly by the new seaside resorts like Bournemouth, Weymouth, Swanage and Weston-super-Mare. After 1880, agriculture entered into a long and painful decline which lasted till 1939, and services and tourism had to take up the slack, supported by some new engineering and light industries in centres like Bristol, Swindon and Yeovil. Emigration dampened population growth, which was much slower than in the industrial Midlands, and North, or in the commercialized Home Counties; but since 1939 the pendulum has swung towards Wessex again. A prosperous, albeit subsidized agriculture, and the new, European-centred hi-tech industries in the Southampton-Bristol corridor point to a more industrialized future.

Among this book's wealth of historical detail and informative maps and illustrations the sections on the history of the Church, of agriculture and of urban development are outstanding. But one of the author's central themes – the slow and laborious evolution of the beautiful Wessex landscape – will perhaps leave the most lasting impression.



# Invasion and survival

David Chandler

DAVID GATES  
The Spanish Ulcer: A history of the Peninsular War  
557pp. Allen and Unwin. £15.  
004948077

The Peninsular War of 1807-14 played a vital part in the fates of four nations, England, France, Spain and Portugal, and a subsidiary one in the history of several more, including Switzerland and Westphalia, which were required to produce formations to swell the Napoleonic Empire's "big battalions". Perceptions vary as to the true significance of the prolonged struggle; and only rarely have these all been treated, mainly from the point of view of military history, in the compass of a single volume. This, with certain reservations, David Gates and his publishers have achieved to a remarkable degree. If the author has not quite equalled what Napier and Oman achieved in their generations, neither has he had their space (six and seven volumes respectively) nor – until now – the scholarly reputation that they enjoyed, to sustain him.

The *Spanish Ulcer* breaks little truly new ground, but it gives the best comprehensive view of the War in Spain and Portugal currently available. A particular strength of the book is that it takes into account the Spanish, Portuguese, French and British points of view when so many earlier books have tended to stress the last-named to the virtual exclusion of at least one of the others – most usually the contribution (flawed but significant, especially in de-

fence) of the Spanish regular army. Gates's overview helps to establish a true sense of proportion, although there is a need for a fuller treatment of the "little war" waged so bitterly and relentlessly by the Spanish guerrillas. Authors have long pleaded that the paucity of source material for this aspect of the war – which probably cost the French fully half the estimated average of 100 troops killed each day over the full seven-year period (or 220,000 in all) – has made a full treatment virtually impossible. In fact Oman gave it considerable prominence, and a mass of virtually untouched information on the guerrillas is said to be ready for use at Southampton University, which has recently received the Stratford Saye archives relating to the first Duke of Wellington. It is a pity that the author was not able to make use of this material, for there is no doubt whatever that the co-operation between the Anglo-Portuguese regular army (small but tough and both well equipped and well led) and the guerrilla and partisan bands posed the French the same insoluble strategic problem (whether to fight concentrated against the conventional opponent or dispersed to counter the widespread irregular bands) that faced the US and South Vietnamese forces between 1965 and 1975.

For the Spanish and Portuguese the war was one of simple national survival against a foreign invader bent on conquest – using whatever allies might be available to assist them. No small part of the energies of the guerrillas was deployed in terrorizing and eliminating the collaborationist and Francophile elements in the Spanish population, mainly concentrated among the intelligentsia and townsfolk. Wellington was aware of this feature of the

struggle – and so is Gates. For the French, Napoleon's opportunist attempt to spread France's sphere of influence to include Lisbon and then the whole of Spain to the Straits of Gibraltar, thus closing many more ports to British trade, rapidly degenerated into the famous "Spanish Ulcer". Napoleon never returned to the Peninsula after early 1809 (he could not bring himself to admit that his personal intervention in 1808 had led to very incomplete results, thanks largely to Sir John Moore's famous "red herring" of the retreat to Corunna). Many of his bickering subordinates lost much of the lustre of their martial reputations in the master's absence. For many French and allied conscripts the prospect of service in Spain after 1810 came to be regarded very much as a one-way ticket.

As for Wellington, he appreciated that he had to preserve England's only field army and at the same time give maximum possible support to Portuguese and Spanish resistance – especially the popular kind. Having established a safe base at Lisbon – the Lines of

## An officer's view

Hew Strachan

J. M. BRERETON  
The British Soldier: A social history from 1661 to the present day  
208pp. Bodley Head. £10.95.  
0370305515

The popularity of military history is such that its annual output is dominated by books like J. M. Brereton's *The British Soldier*. They have no claims to great originality, nor do they expand our knowledge and understanding of the subject; but they are perfectly acceptable, well written, and can safely be recommended as reading for the uninitiated.

Brereton has many recommendations. He was a boy-trumpeter in the Royal Horse Artillery in 1932, he served in pre-war India, and he was commissioned from the ranks in 1940: experience of the old regular army in its imperial heyday therefore illuminates much of what he says. Although he has missed some recent valuable secondary work, he has used a sprinkling of fresh primary sources. His theme is the pay, punishment, pensions, education and terms of service of the other ranks of the British Army. The portrait that emerges is the one familiar in the literature since William Napier: the tough Tommy, enlisted for drink, flogged but phlegmatic, who fights with stoicism, endurance and not a little humour, through to ultimate victory.

*The British Soldier* is described as a social history, but it is more an internal history of the society generated by the army than an attempt

to put the military in the context of civilian society. The social and geographical backgrounds of recruits, the switch from Ireland and Scotland to England, from the country to the town, merit only cursory attention. Indeed ignorance of the wider social context draws Brereton into atypical errors. His claim that illiteracy in the army in the mid-nineteenth century remained as high as it was in civilian life among the equivalent classes is not borne out by the evidence of the 1841 census. Furthermore, the introduction of compulsory schooling for recruits in 1846 undeniably had an impact on their educational standards, and pointed the contrast with a civil society which had no compulsory education until 1870. The military reasons adduced for the introduction of conscription in 1916, "that a large reservoir of fit and healthy young men were shirking their duty", are at least questionable: the army had had considerable difficulty in 1914-15 in equipping and accommodating the flood of voluntary recruits, and the real pressure for conscription was generated by the need to regulate the manpower supply between war industries and military service.

The book is commendably brief (and reasonably priced), but compression brings with it its own debatable, but undebated, judgments. The second chapter fuses comments on life in Marlborough's army with that in Victoria's in such a way as to suppress a sense of chronological development and to ride roughshod over changes and improvements. We are told that "more than a century was to pass" before the principles of the Rifle Brigade in 1800, those of encouraging initiative and independence in soldiers, were emulated in the rest of the army. But these principles find their origins much earlier, with the 60th Royal Americans in the 1750s, and were propagated so well by Sir John Moore at Shorncliffe in 1803 that Wellington's Light Division in the Peninsula became the school and inspiration for the post-Waterloo army.

The British Army, it is often observed, is a collection of regiments. The convenience of a battalion-size formation for imperial garrisoning and for shipment, the self-contained society fostered by prolonged overseas service, has left the regiment with a mystique that ceased to be appropriate in European armies with the development of divisions and corps over a century ago. Brereton subscribes to this tradition, and highlights the role of history and of longevity in its formation. But is this not the officer's view of the regiment? Twentieth-century studies of morale stress the importance of small units, rifle sections, tank crews and gun detachments, the mutual reliance of mates, rather than the battalion. Half the British Army today is made up not of distinguished cavalry and county regiments, but of corps of specialists, most of them of relatively recent creation. And yet they, too, generate their own loyalty and pride. It is a social history of the regiment that we need. The soldier wants a family with which he can identify, but that family may not necessarily have always been that which the more literate and historically-minded have assumed and celebrated.

## Lost before the close

Gregory Palmer

JOHN S. PANCAKE  
This Destructive War: The British campaign in the Carolinas 1780-1782  
293pp. University of Alabama Press. £26.95.  
0817301917

This is the second of two books on the American War of Independence by John S. Pancake: the first, 1777, *the Year of the Hangman*, was published by the same publisher in 1977. Together they deal with the two major British strategic campaigns of the war, and, with the introductory and background chapters which each contains, they provide a very readable account of the military aspect of the American Revolution.

The first campaign, and the subject of the first book, was Burgoyne's attempt to descend from Canada and down the Hudson and so divide the colonies with a chain of British posts; the object was to suppress the rebellion and its legal instrument was the King's proclamation of a state of rebellion of 1775. It ended with the partial surrender of the British at Saratoga in October 1777, which strengthened the American side in several ways, not the least of which, although the least well known (it is not mentioned here), was that supplies for the British and French hostages – the "Convention Army" – had to be paid for, at American insistence, in sterling.

The Convention of Saratoga had two consequences for British policy: the Government was forced to offer terms to the Americans which conceded a considerable degree of "home rule" – consent of the colonial assemblies to taxation bills for example – and France entered the war as an ally of the Americans. American Loyalist exiles in London, among whom were a number of prominent citizens of the Southern colonies, feared that this new situation would encourage the British to seek naval victories, then negotiate peace; those with property in America believed that only a land invasion could secure it through to the conclusion of a peace settlement. A beach-head was established in the South with the reconquest of Savannah in 1778, but the main thrust of the Southern campaign did not come until 1780-82; this is the subject of the second book, a "destructive war" because, quite apart from its defeats, even its victories were expensive and they brought a decision no nearer.

After the British had taken Charleston in 1780, the Loyalist exiles were ordered to return to America, and whether it would make military sense or not, the British attempted to re-establish a semblance of civil government, and to enlist loyal militia to preserve the King's Peace in those areas restored to royal rule. Professor Pancake describes the effects of the military dilemma this posed for the British Army: whether to garrison territory or to engage the enemy's main force. The raising of rival militias (whigs and Tories in the borrowed terminology of the Americans) promoted terrorism, which made it impossible for the regular troops to maintain posts outside Charleston and Savannah, and certainly made civil government impossible.

This is where the British failed. The example of restored Royal authority which might have strengthened the British hand in resumed negotiations did not exist and the war was thus lost even before its weak denouement at Yorktown.

## Revelations

It should have been the glassy sea where seraphim cast down their crowns or something. It was stone. I was thirteen. Something *had* to change, so why not now,

my first Communion? As the gloomy swell of the organ washed me to the altar rail I glimpsed her, kneeling; how her sensible shoe gaped back a little from her heel

which was white and thin. I tried to equate the polystyrene wafer gummed to the roof of my dry mouth with any earthly taste, with any bread or body that I knew.

I stared at the polished marble till my eyes mazed, and it was the surface of a pond, tensed. Slow mud-swirls began to rise like clouds about to part, beneath, beyond.

PHILIP GROSS

## Cutting theory down to sides

Ernest Gellner

DAVID HENDERSON  
Innocence and Design: The influence of economic ideas on policy  
117pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £15 (paperback, £4.95).  
0631 147950

David Henderson has written an elegant, serious and symptomatic book based on the Reith Lectures he gave last year. *Innocence and Design* has a lucid and conspicuous structure. It contains a sustained argument, and verges on being – as the author notes with a touch of embarrassment – a kind of intellectual autobiography. It is also an account of the climate prevailing in the world in which the civil service, academia and politics overlap. I suspect that future historians eager to get a feel of that world will derive a good deal from this book. As for the autobiographical element, a fitting and accurate title might well have been *Confessions of a Teenage Keynesian*. Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, though this is not the sort of language Henderson employs. It is not that the author is now disenchanted with his erstwhile vision, but the stress has shifted markedly.

The modification of Professor Henderson's once full-blooded Keynesianism, under the impact of a lifetime of experience as an academic economist and economic adviser, occurs at two levels, which are interestingly intertwined. Keynesianism meant a switch of focus in economics, away from the problem of how wealth is distributed among various factors in the economy, to the question of how the total output is determined, in other words to macroeconomics. Pre-Keynesian conventional wisdom was inclined to evade this problem as intractable. The crisis of the 1930s made it difficult not to face it, whether it was formally soluble or not. Keynes provided the rationale for deeming it manageable, both in theory and in practice.

Henderson describes very interestingly how his civil service experience as an adviser – he has been Economic Adviser at the Treasury, Chief Economist in the Ministry of Aviation, and a Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Wales – led him first to take part in, then to become fascinated by, and finally to be converted to the importance of that non-macro world in which competing interests fight for a share of the cake. It seems that this is where the action is, and perhaps even where the fate of the total economy is decided. In his advisory role he actually asked to be assigned full-time to this sphere. A full-blooded Keynesian might have looked down on this as slumping.

This shift in the economic centre of gravity was accompanied in Henderson's mind by a refinement of Keynes's famous observation about the relative roles of theory and practice. Keynes maintained that it was not vested and sectional interests, but outdated and above all unconsciously held ideas, masquerading as simple untheoretical common sense, which were the real menace, the real obstacle to a rational handling of economic problems. Presumably he had people like Montagu Norman in mind. The trouble with ideas such as Say's Law was not so much that they were false, as that people did not even know they held them – though they did and, more important, acted on them. Keynes's *General Theory* was meant to be a kind of psychoanalysis of the economic and financial establishment: if only its members could be brought to see that they held certain unconscious economic ideas, deposited, not by infantile trauma, but by the resonance of dated and forgotten theories, then the demonstration of the falsity or limits of those ideas would be a relatively easy matter. The brilliance of Keynes's style, and above all the absolute appositeness of his ideas to the needs and mood of the time, persuaded most people; the depth therapy, however, only worked for a time. The problems and the mood changed, and the previously exorcized conventional wisdom re-emerged as a new enlightenment.

That, however, is another story, and is not what preoccupies Henderson. He did not indulge in any such U-turn. He merely modified his position, as you might say, at the margin. He does not like absolutist Yes/No thinking, and marginalist tinkering, whether or not it captures the real nature of the economy, re-

flects the tuning of his own mind. A little less Keynes at the margin, and a little more something else. But concerning this intriguing and important matter of the relative role of interests, of archaic-unconscious preconception and of overt enlightened ideas, it was rather a matter of refining the conceptual framework.

His advisory experience convinced Henderson that, in macroeconomics, Keynes's account might well be right. But at that other level at which he now preferred to advise, the situation was more complex. For one thing, brazenly promoted interests, rather than unconscious and dated ideas, were important. (For Keynes, the unconscious influence of the head rather than guts was the main menace.) And the real enemy, obstructing the implementation of rational policy, was not the echoes from long-dead economists and other scribblers, but something else, something which for Henderson may well be Public Enemy No 1: Do It Yourself Economics.



Three young mine workers; reproduced from *The Kingdom of Coal: Work, enterprise, and ethnic communities in the fields* by Donald L. Miller and Richard E. Sharples (360pp. University of Pennsylvania Press. 08122 1201 0).

Henderson is an urbane and civilized writer who does not raise his voice. When DIYE Makes its appearance – the abbreviation is in his book and, one imagines, is deeply engraved in his conscious and unconscious minds – the tone remains even, the style restrained and rational. But the reader may suspect that the facial and arm muscles become set and tense, the smile less warm and genuine. Whether Henderson suffers fools gladly I do not know, but he does not suffer DIYE gladly at all, and in its urbane Whitehall/Oxford way, this book is a settlement of scores with it.

Where does it come from, for one thing? Henderson cannot quite fathom this. Where others have deplored the atavistic drives that lead men to murder, rape and torture, he has difficulty in hiding his deep distaste for the dark gods which lead men to bad economics. What worries me, however, is that these dreadful dark gods may yet have something to be said in their favour. The trouble is that what appears as DIYE to Henderson, is often liable to be the articulation of important non-economic considerations, rather than the expression of bad economics. This may be so even if, from some kind of *pudeur* or in deference to current styles, it is expressed superficially in economic terms. Conversely, what appears as sound economics may simply be the expression of a blinkered, narrow, historically unimaginative Do It Yourself Sociology. Unadmitted sociological assumptions, acutely ethnocentric in time, space or culture, are liable to pervade economic theory. DIYS may irritate a critic as much as DIYE annoys Henderson. Many economists are totally unaware of possessing a sociological unconscious, and any attempts to extract its contents are liable to meet with blank incomprehension. Economics sensitizes its initiates to certain kinds of consideration, but it also makes them insensitive to, or positively embarrassed by, certain other kinds.

Henderson understands very clearly what is involved in the economic vision:

The orthodox (economic) system focuses on individual agents who are seeking economic advantage, it views their thoughts and actions, and their relations with others, in terms of transactions which are subject to more or less systematic calculation with a view to maximizing probable gain. It draws attention to the ways in which markets can enable these transactions to be conducted more effectively ... and it looks for ways in which the sphere of markets can be extended.

He makes it perfectly clear that this vision is not applicable throughout human life. But he wishes to see its range extended, though not without limits. What are those limits? We are not told. He is, he assures us, less of an imperialist for his subject than some of his colleagues. This much is clear, and central to his book: he wishes to extend those limits sufficiently to diminish DIYE, with its "mutually reinforcing centralist, nationalist and mercantilist assumptions".

DIYE has various features which Henderson describes with wit, but let me single out one of them: *Micawber's dichotomy*, a "chronic bias ... towards the dramatic", which in

economic hyper-liberalism, should make itself look foolish by excessive interference in the fate of a relatively small company such as Westland? One might have expected such a government to seem to ignore national interest, by refraining from interference for the sake of its principles. But on the contrary: rival groups in the cabinet were so eager to interfere, that they appeared to lose all sense of decorum, loyalty and caution, in their enthusiasm for thwarting each others' interventions.

Henderson is of course not responsible for these goings-on. But does not the selfsame contradiction run through his own attitude? The sphere in which he wishes to extend the influence of sound economic theory, where it is in dire peril from DIYE, is micro-economics. But is not the essence of the market-inspired vision precisely that in this sphere what is required is not sound advice, but no advice at all? The only counsel he can consistently give to those making recommendations, is the same as that offered by Mr Punch to those about to get married.

You cannot advise those who are in the market. The market model cannot depend for its functioning on the theories held by them. It depends only on their interests, and on the market selection of those who, in the pursuit of their own interests, serve those of others. Sound theory can only aid, not the participants, but their political mentors. But if these are indispensable, and if they counsel anything other than their own silence, we are no longer in a market society. The "trahison des libéraux" occurs not with the giving of bad advice, but with the giving of any advice. This highlights the difficulties of economic liberalism in an age whose institutional framework no longer favours it. If paternalistic advisers trained in the right kind of economics are required to guide those who act in the market, are we in the presence of a real market?

Mr Micawber may indeed be a bad or even comic guide to a consumer's micro-conduct in the age of inflation. No one is doomed to misery by mild overspending on his credit card. But when we come to the major issues which concern us, the Planck/Micawber principle of Qualitative Jumps is a more accurate representation of how things stand than orthodox marginalism.

Economics does not really have a distinct realm of objects or phenomena to call its own. Rather, most, or perhaps all, social activities have their economic aspect. Whether, in connection with any particular issue, the aspect captured by the economic style of thought should predominate over the others, does not seem to me an easy question to answer. There are some extremists among economists who would say that it should always prevail, though Henderson makes it plain that he is not one of them. But he does make it clear that it should prevail more often than it does, and that it would be to our advantage if it did. His book is a sermon, and what it preaches is that the frontiers of DIYE should be pushed back: not infinitely, but significantly.

This is the real topic of the book, which externalizes an inner debate with DIYE, as angry as Whitehall urbanity permits, in other words impeccably cool in manner and carefully restrained in its claims. Now the issue of the relevance and authority of economic and non-economic considerations is both important and fascinating. But if we are to watch a good match, it is necessary that the opposition be represented by its first eleven. It isn't here. When Keynes wanted to exorcize the logical compulsions operating in the unconscious of the economic and financial establishments of his time, he had a pretty good idea what the contents of that unconscious were, and devoted some research to it, as is manifest in the *General Theory*. But Henderson in effect presents DIYE as a nutty atavism, more deserving of contempt than of serious investigation.

Though their existence is admitted, there are few signs in the book of either the names or the ideas of those who have seriously challenged the authority of the economic vision. If the book had an index, which it does not, Fred Hirsch's name would be in it, only because two authors who are cited originally presented their material as Hirsch Memorial Lectures. No whiff of Veblen, Galbraith, Karl Polanyi, M. Sahlins, Mary Douglas. The whole debate between formalists and substantivists in







# Cellos and tongs and bones

George Szirtes

JAMES REEVES  
Complete Poems for Children  
Illustrated by Edward Ardizzone  
194pp. Heinemann. £8.95.  
043495893 X  
CHRISTOPHER LOGUE (Compiler)  
The Children's Book of Children's Rhymes  
Illustrated by Bill Tidy  
160pp. Batsford. £6.95.  
0713449128

The combination of James Reeves and Edward Ardizzone at once conjures up a mid-century world divided between hearth and garden – an honest, affectionate, dreamy and fantastic place. The children are well versed in traditional literature, are faintly aware of the cold mystery of the moon and stars and may safely play in woods, parks or the streets, even at dusk. The further we leave this world behind the tighter yet richer it seems. James Reeves owned quite a large patch of it. Of course he was an adult, writing for children as an adult sees them, not patronizing his audience but finding some part of his own memory and imagination that responded to them. In order to enter this realm he had to become a compound of kind uncle and Mad Tom. He wrote both well and badly, he could rhyme and skip lazily as well as ingeniously. He didn't mind using archaisms because he saw these as part of a living tradition of ballads and nursery rhymes. Stevenson, Kipling, de la Mare, Milne and Graham shared the same territory, which Shakespeare and Blake also visited. One of Ardizzone's illustrations for the present book, showing two girls dancing in a room, could almost be Blake domesticated and set down in a 1950s drawing-room.

Reeves's best work for children was done in his early to middle period, in *The Wandering Moon* (1950) and *The Blackbird in the Lilac* (1952). While these are often romantic in diction and owe much to de la Mare, his response to his subjects was lively enough to make them

highly potent. Everyday things like clothes-lines (in "Stocking and Shirt"), grass, stones along the seashore, or ruminating cows ruminating bring out the close observer in him, and show his understanding of moods and manners. At other times sheer fantasy overtakes him, and in *Prefabulous Animals* (1957) it creates a group of nonsense creatures to join the snarks, boojums, dongs and jumbles of his predecessors. Ardizzone's drawings are perfect for Reeves, firm, not too threatening but properly mysterious. The goddess for both of them is Nature, who may be fickle yet remains welcoming and reassuring. There is also a fine gallery of human characters flitting through the books, eccentric English archetypes like "Dr John Hearty", whose delight is to escape from the tight grip of the material world. Though the trappings of Reeves's alternative world have changed, the entrances to it remain open.

Children as they act en masse are much more in evidence in Christopher Logue's anthology, and Bill Tidy's rough and vigorous drawings capture their spirit as surely as Ardizzone did Reeves's. I suppose its chief attraction will be the neatly debunking rude rhymes featured wittily on the jacket illustration. The children here have taken up advertising jingles, popular songs and the incidental details of adult problems, ground them up with the joys of poo, goo, piddle and snot, and have made ingenious ways of threatening, mocking and counting each other out. This is streetwise stuff, and most of it will already be well known in the fraternity, except for the American references ("The cooties hit a home run . . .", "Stick her head in gasoline . . ." etc). It is interesting to see "beetles" spelt as "beetles" but the mistake might just be deliberate. Hitler, Kaiser Bill and Wallace Beary (sic) jostle with Woolies, KP Chewing Gum, and Marks and Spencer. It was of course the rough and demotic that Auden praised in *The Poet's Tongue*. But all things in balance: tongs and bones are all right, but sound best after an excess of cellos. I would take these books in the proportion of three Reeves to one Logue.

## Winning on points

Phillip Thody

SIMON FARRELL and JON SUTHERLAND  
Madame Guillotine: The French Revolution  
199pp. Real Life Gamebooks. Grafton.  
Paperback, £1.95.  
0583307143

If you have an intelligent eleven-year-old on holiday with you in a televisionless cottage, or need to travel through rather dull country with him in a crowded train, you could well be grateful to the well-meaning person who slipped you a copy of this paperback in the hope of communicating to you charge some knowledge of what it was that led Madame Defarge to knit so furiously. The donor might be disappointed at your pupil's subsequent inability to tell you why Louis XVI was executed, or slightly taken aback by his insistence that Valmy is just the name of a sergeant. He might be equally baffled by being told, parrot-fashion, that in 1795, "France is now ruled by the Directory and order is restored", and if you yourself have a nodding acquaintance with modern views of the French Revolution as class conflict, the struggle between town and country, or the unnecessarily bloody prelude to the rule of the middle class in France, you might be a little surprised to be faced with a view of events which makes *The Scarlet Pimpernel* look like a sophisticated essay in political analysis. But the game is won when you get into it and even crude ideas of history are better than none at all. The French themselves, I was horrified to learn recently, have never heard of *les tricolores*. Don't they read anything these days either?

A young officer in the 41st Regiment of Foot, one Philippe (sic), though it does later become Philippe d'Arvergne is on duty in Paris in late June (7) 1789, near the Palais Royale (sic). The mob is approaching, and he has to decide what to do. If he obeys the order to fire, he moves to paragraph 60 and begins a series of adventures which will, if he is lucky, culminate in the spectacular arrest of a group of escaping aristocrats. This will set his

feet firmly on the road to a career in the service of the Revolution. If he obeys orders, and continues to stay loyal to the Crown, he eventually succeeds (again if he is very lucky) in enabling the aristocrats to escape to Scotland. This will provide him with a good basis for a future in which he will "fight the Revolution and someday return to France". There is no mention either of Citizen Bonaparte or of the fact that young Philippe will, if he does come back and expect to be welcomed as an aristocrat, be at least forty-four.

At the start of the game, Philippe has to distribute his allotted fifty skill points in such a way as to provide himself with what he hopes will be the right combination of Strength, Agility, Luck, Persuasion, Firearm aptitude, Swordsmanship and Horsemanship. A high number of points in a particular category will give him a better chance of overcoming the disadvantage of an unlucky roll of the dice in one of the many tricky situations in which he finds himself. Alternatively, an unfortunate choice might well bring about his sudden departure from this world before he and the Revolution are much older. Other books in this series include *The Last Invasion: 1066*, and the authors would like to hear of other periods of history which might serve as background. Since they are so good at avoiding ideology, I suggest *Ireland: 1638-1690* and *Russia: 1917-1922*.

In the May 1986 issue of *Signal*, Anthea Bell and Brian Morse write about Gareth Owen's collection of poems *Song of the City* (Fontana Young Lions) which was their choice for this year's Signal Poetry Award. In the same issue Judy Taylor describes her picture research for a book on Beatrix Potter; Jane Doonan looks at the aesthetic heritage of Maurice Sendak's *Outside Over There*; and Elaine Moss reports on the Children's Book Circle's recent one-day conference. *Signal 50* is available from The Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Glos GL5 5EQ. It is published three times a year: annual subscription £6.50; single issues £2.10.

The wolf Socrates ("A philosopher spends a lot of time thinking. Perhaps that is why he is so thin") and Pythagoras the frog, who is sometimes hard to understand. In his most recent book with Tuyoal Mori, Anno's Three Little Pigs (Bodley Head. £6.95. 037030898 0), Mitsumasa Anno illustrates the mathematical concept of combinatorial analysis. The story tells how Socrates spends all night working out which of five cottages could contain one of the three little pigs; a series of diagrams and an explanatory appendix analyse the problem. All ends somewhat improbably with thirty-five possible ways in which Socrates' dinner could be disposed and the wolves and pigs playing happily together.

## A world for the unworldly

Andrew Motion

ANNABEL FARJEON  
Morning Has Broken: A biography of Eleanor Farjeon  
315pp. Julia MacRae. £14.95.  
0862032253

Eleanor Farjeon lived for more than eighty years (from 1881 to 1965) and wrote more than eighty books – but neither in her life nor in her books did she seem to learn much from experience. The ferment of modern history barely ruffled her composure; the upheavals of modern writing simply left her unaffected. She seems never to have read Pound, Eliot, Auden or even Hopkins. Hers was, for good and for ill, an extraordinarily unblemished existence – on the one hand unselfconsciously virtuous, on the other mind-bogglingly incurious. The place which she celebrated in her autobiography *A Nursery in the Nineties* (1935) was both the reliable source of her imaginative excitement, and its crucially restricted definition.

In *Morning Has Broken* Annabel Farjeon sympathetically and uncritically evokes both facets of her aunt's unworldliness. The early years (the Nursery years) are the most interesting and the most successfully treated. Eleanor Farjeon's clever American mother, her novelist father B. L. Farjeon and her three brothers – Harry, Bertie and Joe – wove around and with her an elaborately fantastical, bookish, games-playing world in which she was, she said herself, "intensely absorbed". It was a productive but also a retarding environment, resulting in a stream of poems, plays and musical projects, while also shielding her from adult cares and responsibilities. She collaborated with her brother on successful musical comedies from *Floretta* (1899, with Harry) to *The Two Bouquets* (1938, with Bertie). Of her poems and stories for children over ten titles are still in print, including *Nursery Rhymes of London Town* (1916) and *The Little Bookroom* (a selection of her stories made in 1955 for which she won the Carnegie and Hans Christian Andersen medals). By the time her father died in 1903 she was, at twenty-two, almost completely lacking in social savoir, imitative rather than imaginative, physically insecure and sexually inexperienced. "My eyesight is as myopic as my insight", she admitted.

She hoped, predictably, that a deficient knowledge of the world without would allow her to nurture a world within. But there is little evidence to support her claim that "Nothing in life approached the scale of my world in the dark." The early work, at least, shows facility without any arresting peculiarity of character: the emotional barriers are indestructible. The first – and almost the last – time they gave any sign of being breached was in her relationship with Edward Thomas, whom she met shortly before the First World War. Thomas's marriage was in trouble, and although he relied heavily on his wife, Helen, for practical sup-

port and comfort, he valued Eleanor Farjeon for her Shelleyan ethereality. Farjeon responded to his loving kindness with love proper: walking and talking endlessly with him, typing his poems and, after his death in 1917, grieving for him all her life. Her own most durable monument is her monument to him: *Edward Thomas: The last four years* (1958).

Thomas's companionship, and the society of his acquaintances in general and D. H. Lawrence in particular, persuaded her to grapple more closely with "direct personal experience". Thomas's death both endorsed and undermined her conviction of its value. After this war she spent two years in rural seclusion, "learning to cope with fear", as her niece put it, then returned to Hampstead, the scene of her childhood, in 1921. Shortly after her arrival – and much to her friends' surprise – she began what proved to be a virtually lifelong affair with a married man ten years older than herself: the "unconventional rationalist" and seeker after the "pure and noble", George Earle.

Their life together reads in Annabel Farjeon's mild-mannered account like an only slightly more sophisticated version of the existence she had known as a child – Earle pulling encouragingly on his pipe, Eleanor churning out poems, children's stories and schemes for musical comedies. When national crisis threatened, the couple cheerfully hid in their bomb shelter; when personal dramas brewed they took comfort in the beneficence of Eleanor's "wide-ranging heart". When Eleanor fell in love with Otto Lampel, a collaborator in one of her musical schemes, for instance, Earle sat at home sticking pokers into the fire until they were red hot, then bending them. Eleanor, compassionately and yet coolly, referred to both Earle and Lampel as "poor small boys".

Earle's death in 1949 destroyed the circumstances of Eleanor Farjeon's life without inflicting much perceptible damage on her innocence. Undaunted, she cast around for someone else to share it with, and soon settled on the shy, gay, claustrophobically inclined actor, Denys Blakelock. With him, Annabel Farjeon makes plain, the mixture of Eleanor's life – or rather its singleness of temper – remained much as before. When she was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1951, aged seventy, she was still referring to herself as "a very old baby". It is a self-definition which accurately strikes the note of her fey charm as woman and as a writer, while also suggesting how easy it is to feel irritated by her reluctance to swim in the currents of personal and public history. Annabel Farjeon succeeds well enough in registering the charm, but her biography is too kindly to become, as it reasonably might, exasperated.

The Children's Book Circle has recently announced that the winner of the 1986 Eleanor Farjeon Award for distinguished service to children and to books is Judith Elkin.

# Sales of books and manuscripts

H. R. Woudhuysen

Sotheby's summer English literature and history sale on July 10 and 11 is plump with rich items, especially those relating to Oscar Wilde, whose statuesque person, caught possibly by Lord Alfred Douglas in 1897 outside the Royal Palace in Naples, appears on the front and back covers of the elegantly illustrated catalogue. Wilde is represented by photographs (including an apparently unique one taken on his American tour, which reveals the right ear the Library of Congress version of the same picture dares not show – estimate £500-£600), by his visiting card as Mr Sebastian Melmoth (estimate £200-£300), by theatre programmes and publicity photographs, by letters and poems, published and unpublished, by books and autograph drafts and by an excruciatingly dull watercolour of the view from Moytura House, presented to the future bride of the author of *Dracula* in 1876: it is believed to be Wilde's only known watercolour and is expected to fetch £10,000-£15,000.

Some of the best Wilde items come from the descendants of his friend Carlos Blacker ("What marvellous evenings, dear Carlos, we used to have! What brilliant dinners! What days of laughter and delight!"). The finest letter (a mere twelve pages) in the sale is addressed to Blacker and was written shortly after Wilde's release from gaol: it is expected to fetch as much as £25,000. Blacker's inscribed presentation copy of the third edition of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, 1898, is estimated at £3,000-£4,000 and it is Blacker's copy of a working typescript of *De Profundis* with two carbons, all corrected by "Stuart Mason".

## AMONG THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTORS

Jeremy Adler has been a fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin, for the academic year 1985-86. Beatrice Bartlett teaches Ch'ing and modern Chinese history at Yale University. She was the co-organizer, in 1978, of the first International Ch'ing archives symposium held in Taipei. Her book on the founding and growth of the Grand Council in eighteenth-century China will be published next year.

Julian Budden is working on a study of Puccini. His third volume of *The Operas of Verdi*, from Don Carlos to Falstaff was published in 1981.

David Chandler is Head of the Department of War Studies and International Affairs at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. His *The Big Hate: The marshals of Napoleon* will be published this autumn.

Michael Crowder is Professor of History at the University of Botswana and Consultant Editor of *History Today*.

David Danville is a fellow of Girton College, Cambridge. His *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* will be published shortly.

Ernest Gellner is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. His most recent books are *Relativism and the Social Sciences* and *The Psychoanalytic Movement*, which were published last year.

Richard Gray is Professor of African History and Chairman of the Centre of Religion and Philosophy at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Jasper Griffin is a Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford. His books include *Latin Poets and Roman Life*, 1985. *His The Mirror of Myth* appeared earlier this year.

Paul Griffiths is the editor of the *Thames and Hudson Encyclopaedia of 20th Century Music*.

Tim Halliday is a Reader in Biology at the Open University. He is the author of *Sexual Strategy*, 1980.

Christopher Harvie's books include *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish society and politics, 1707-1977*, 1977. Michael Havinden is the author of *The Somerset Landscape*, 1981, in the Making of the English Landscape series.

Ian Hornbrough is Director of Studies at the Royal College of Music. His *Leos Janáček: The field that prospered* was published in 1981.

Gabriel Joripoviet's most recent novel, *Contre-Jour*, will be reviewed shortly in the TLS.

Hermione Lee's books include *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, 1977. She has presented the television programme *Book Four*.

Michael Lipton is a Professional Fellow in Economics at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. His books include *Why Poor People Stay Poor: Urban bias in world development*, 1978.

John Lucas's *Moderns and Contemporaries: Novelists, poets, critics* was published last year.

Blake Morrison's collection of poems, *Dark Glasses*, was published in 1984.

Heather O'Donoghue is a Fellow of Somerville College, Oxford.

Mark O'Shea was Chairman of the International Herpetological Society from 1984 to 1986.

Anthony Pope is a lecturer in Music at the University of Lancaster.

Jonathan Powell is a Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, and the author of *Aristocracy*, 1984.

Claude Rawson's most recent book is *Order from Confusion Springs: Studies in eighteenth-century literature from Swift to Cowper*, 1985.

Peter Reading's latest collection of poems is *Ukulele Music*, which was published last year.

Paul Craig Roberts is William E. Simon Professor in Political Economy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University. His books include *The Supply-Side Revolution*, 1984.

M. L. Rosenthal's *Poetry and the Common Life* appeared in 1983.

Christopher Rowe is Senior Lecturer in Classics in the University of Bristol. His *Plato in the Philosophers in Context* series was published in 1984.

George Rudé's most recent book is *Criminal and Victim: Crime and society in early nineteenth-century England*, 1985.

Geoffrey Sampson's most recent book is *Writing Systems: A linguistic introduction*, 1985.

Thomas A. Sebeok is the Editor-in-Chief of the *International Encyclopedia Dictionary of Semiotics*.

Charles Steeth is Professor, Emeritus of English at the Brooklyn College of the City University of New York.

Zara Steiner is a Fellow of New Hall, Cambridge. She is editor of *The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World*, 1982.

Ben Stuchman is a fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. His most recent book is *From Waterloo to Balaclava: Tactics, technology and the British army*, 1985.

Jeremy Waldron is currently Visiting Professor on the Jurisprudence and Social Policy Program at the University of California, Berkeley.

Arnold Wainfall is the author of *The Music of Britain and Tippett: Studies in themes and techniques*, 1982. He is Professor of Musical Theory and Analysis at King's College, London.

possibly prepared for the libel action of 1913 against Arthur Ransome, and exhibiting some interesting textual variants, which is expected to fetch £6,000-£8,000. Also from Blacker come interesting and poignant papers, letters and memorabilia relating to Constance Wilde.

From other sources come an unpublished poem, "Heart's Yearnings", probably written at Magdalen in a very neat and correct hand which contrasts painfully with Wilde's later script (estimate £20,000-£25,000), the autograph manuscript of his poem "The Harlot's House" which displays several readings different from the published text, and two letters which even the heroic editorial activities of Sir Rupert Hart-Davis have failed to unearth. One is to a Mrs Allhusen agreeing to read her story ("I hope it is not too long") and the other is a characteristically generous reference for H. E. Yeo to the painter Stacey Marks: these are estimated at £700-£800 and £600-£800 respectively. This is the finest collection of Wilde material to have been offered for sale for a long time.

The most stunning item in the rest of the sale must be the death mask of Keats, which is expected to fetch as much as £50,000. This is a cracked, late nineteenth-century copy, but since the original mould made under Joseph Severn's direction has disappeared, it is probably the best extant likeness of the dead poet's cruelly pinched face. An apparently unpublished letter from Samvyl Johnson to William Bowles about his visit to Bowles's house near Salisbury, written on August 21, 1783, the year of his stroke, is equally moving (estimate £2,500-£3,500). Another apparently unpublished letter from Laurence Sterne in Rome in March 1766 to Richard Chapman outlining his movements while abroad has what seems a

rather low estimate of £400-£500. It is interesting to contrast this price with that estimated for a rare autograph letter from the poet James Thomson to his patron George Lyttelton explaining why he is not inclined to marry the lady whom Lyttelton has proposed as suitable for the poet's wife ("I am too much advanced in life to venture to marry, without feeling myself invigorated"); nevertheless urging Lyttelton to marry again: Thomson has recently attracted serious critical interest and this remarkable letter is expected to fetch as much as £3,000. There is some good Horace Walpole material in this section of the catalogue and from a little later a fine, long and chatty autograph letter from Edward FitzGerald to Thackeray (Cowper's poems are "not heroic, but they make me cry"), incorporating two original poems, which is estimated at £800-£1,000.

From the earlier period there is a remarkable contemporary account of the burning down of the Globe Theatre during a performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, described by its alternative title *All is True* (see TLS, June 20), estimated at £15,000-£25,000, a collection of seventeenth-century pamphlets belonging to Isaac Walton, three of which bear his signature (estimate £3,500-£5,000), an unrecorded near-contemporary manuscript of Thomas More's *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* (estimate £25,000-£28,000), and an important letter from Sir Edward Dyer to the Earl of Leicester written on October 19, 1579, implicating John Leslie in a plot to free Mary Queen of Scots (estimate £1,000-£1,500). Two early calligraphic manuscripts are particularly fine: the first is of the moral quatrains of Guy du Faur, Seigneur de Pibrac, written for the Earl of Somerset as a New Year's gift in 1614/15 by the important Huguenot female scribe and nurse to Prince Henry, Esther Inglis. The second is by Nicholas Hilliard's younger brother, the Cambridge don Ezechiel Hilliard, and is an address to Queen Elizabeth written in 1589; the two manuscripts are estimated to fetch at least £1,000 each.

There is plenty of other material which is of interest in the rest of the sale. There are large collections of Cavafy (all in Greek), D. H. Lawrence, Sassoon, Shaw (including his working papers for *Common Sense about the War*, 1914 – estimate £12,000-£15,000 – and the original album containing his photographs and rhyming verses for his last book, a picture guide to Ayot St Lawrence – estimate £6,000-£8,000), Yeats (including the corrected galley proofs for the play *The King's Threshold* – estimate £1,500-£2,500), Churchill (a long correspondence with Lloyd George and a remarkable letter written as a journalist and recently-captured prisoner of war in South Africa – "it is rather an unfortunate beginning to our expedition" – estimated at £4,000-£6,000), Disraeli and Paine. But all of these are dwarfed by the vast mass of the papers of Richard Graham, Viscount Preston, a huge collection of state papers covering the years 1674-89. The 6,000 pages of documents include royal letters, letters from Halifax and Etherege, inventories of Preston's library and papers relating to the Hudson's Bay Company and New Hampshire. The archive is estimated to fetch between £100,000 and £120,000; apparently historians have not made much use of it.

A few items are refreshingly intimate. Auden writes to Betjeman ("one can always find people who share one's taste in art or bodies, but I have to play hymns to myself"), and A. A. Milne's draft with E. H. Shepherd's preparatory drawings and the printer's working typescript to *When We Were Very Young*, with other material collected by Carl H. Pforzheimer, is just as innocent, although it is expected to fetch £120,000-£150,000, against just £400-£500 for Auden's letter. It is hard to imagine a more attractive map of Wales than the unrecorded proof engraving of one by Christopher Saxton, probably produced around 1580, which is hand-coloured with manuscript additions and is estimated at £50,000-£60,000. Finally there are two out of four moving issues of the painfully titled magazine *Here Today* produced by prisoners in Changi Jail, Singapore in 1944-5. There was only one typewritten and hand-decorated copy of each issue: these two are estimated at £6,000-£8,000 – they are remarkable documents in a remarkable sale.

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David Bolt, himself a novelist and former literary agent, has now written *An Authors' Handbook* (170pp. Pinter. Paperback, £3.95. 0 86188390 X). Intended mainly for aspirant and as yet unpublished writers, the book offers guidance and advice on a wide range of subjects, including punctuation, Public Lending Right, copyright (American, serial, translation, etc) and presentation of manuscripts.